

BIG OAKS

Newsletter of Big Oaks National Wildlife Refuge & Big Oaks Conservation Society

Spring 2003

WELCOME to the land of BIG OAKS

Big Oaks National Wildlife Refuge is a unique natural area in southern Indiana. The new refuge encompasses most of the area formerly known as Jefferson Proving Ground. Big Oaks was established in June 2000. Indiana's largest National Wildlife Refuge presently contains 50,000 acres of managed wildlife habitat. It is home to some 30,000 acres of forest, 10,000 acres of grassland, over 30 miles of protected streams, and 32 caves. There are over 120 breeding bird species and 46 state rare and endangered plants on the property. The refuge is managed to provide for biodiversity, thus, it protects endangered and threatened species, provides resting, nesting and feeding habitat for migratory birds, and provides habitat for resident wildlife. The National Wildlife Refuge System will celebrate its 100th birthday in 2003, and it is an exciting year for Big Oaks and the local community.

This is the first issue of **Big Oaks**, a bi-annual newsletter published by **Big Oaks Conservation Society** in support of Big Oaks National Wildlife

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Refuge. The newsletter will keep you updated on refuge news and will hopefully encourage you to visit Big Oaks. Annual members of the Big Oaks Conservation Society will receive future issues. Inside you will find information that will explain how to participate in a variety of refuge activities and events.

See for yourself what Big Oaks has to offer!

Manager's Corner - Joe Robb

I would like to personally welcome you by way of this newsletter to Big Oaks National Wildlife Refuge. Indiana's newest and largest National Wildlife Refuge is rich in natural resources, cultural history, and contrasts. Some of you have already experienced the wild beauty of this landscape. In the last year we had 20,000 refuge visits. Participants came from 20 different states. Public use on the refuge can vary from wildlife viewing, school field trips, a fishing excursion to Old Timbers Lake, or a first class deer or turkey hunt. Because we are an overlay refuge on Army owned property, we have a continued working relationship with the Army. We also work with the Indiana Air National Guard, who operate Jefferson Range, which is not part of, but is surrounded by the refuge. This level of complexity offers challenges and opportunity for partnerships. Safety at the refuge is of primary concern and influences all of our management decisions. Due to past Army munitions tests, we require every visitor to go through a safety briefing and sign an Acknowledgment of Danger form. Approximately 23,000 acres of the refuge is closed to the public because of munitions. The threat from munitions is present on public use areas as well, which is why the refuge requires visitors to attend the safety briefing. The closed areas on the refuge offer wildlife true sanctuary, free from day to day disturbances, which is critical for some sensitive wildlife species. Our challenge as a refuge is to first provide needed wildlife habitat that offers a glimpse into Indiana's past natural heritage, and to provide safe public use opportunities. I want Big Oaks to be part of the local community.

If you would like more information about Big Oaks NWR, please contact us at the refuge office at 812-273-0783 or e-mail me, joe_robb@fws.gov.

USE OPPORTUNITIES at BIG OAKS

What are some of the activities visitors can do at the refuge? Visitors can hunt white-tailed deer and wild turkey. You may also fish at Old Timbers Lake, however, because of high demand, there is a quota system for boaters. If you enjoy observing wildlife and photography, the refuge offers many scenic areas of hardwood forest, wetland, grassland and shrub land habitat. There is much diversity among the plants, fish, birds and other animals that inhabit the refuge. You may also enjoy the interpretive programs that focus on habitat restoration and management. The refuge enjoys providing educational opportunities for students, educators and organizations.

VISITOR INFORMATION

All visitors must annually view a safety video and sign an acknowledgment of danger form. This will give you access to the areas designated for public use. There is a daily access fee, or users may purchase an annual pass. The day use area covers 4,170 acres. An additional 22,500 acres is open to the public for special hunts and guided tours. The public may access the refuge from mid-April to the end of November every Monday and Friday, and the second and fourth Saturdays from 7:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Would you like to become a Big Oaks Volunteer? Opportunities are plentiful to assist refuge staff in their management of the sprawling 50,000-acre refuge. There are a variety of positions available. At least one is sure to fit every individual's desire to participate.

Those who enjoy fieldwork and the outdoors are needed to lead wildlife and educational tours at the refuge. Likewise, individuals or community-minded groups who would like to pitch in are also needed for bi-annual litter pick-ups along the refuge roadsides. Both of these tasks permit volunteers the

opportunity to access Big Oaks at no cost and to see areas of the refuge not commonly viewed by typical visitors. If indoor tasks are more your cup of tea, then consider the refuge's need for speakers who can visit schools and civic groups to speak about Big Oaks. Those interested in becoming ambassadors for Big Oaks would receive instruction and training in the history and on-going projects associated with the refuge. For individuals who don't care to wander Big Oaks vast spaces or are intimidated at the prospect of speaking to strangers, then the friendly U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) staff could always use help in their office. This could involve checking in visitors, answering phones or aiding in the refuge's safety-briefing program.

The opportunity to become involved is open to all. Other opportunities will become available as the refuge develops its plans for the future.

SPECIES SPOTLIGHT

River Otter



Photo taken by Dale Sides - Firefighter

In 1996 twenty-five river otters were released in Big Oaks NWR. Six more were released in 1999. They have adapted quite well to their refuge home. The otters are reproducing and are seen frequently. They benefit fisheries by eating rough fish.

BIG OAKS HISTORY

Did you know ...

One of the reasons a munitions testing facility was established north of Madison was because the area reflected the "largest undeveloped tract of acreage east of the Mississippi." Chances are, those who were displaced might disagree.

Big Oaks/JPG has an interesting Civil War history. On July 12, 1863, Confederate General John Hunt Morgan and 2,000 cavalymen rode across the area essentially following what is now called D Road. Two stone markers erected by the Jefferson Historical Society in the 1930's show the route, while a third stands where three of Morgan's men were captured.

BIG OAKS NOTES



NEW Big Oaks Web Site

Check out the new website!
<http://Midwest.fws.gov/bigoaks>

Deer Hunt Synopsis

During October and November 2002, hunters harvested 805 deer. Hunters were drawn by the state and through local lotteries to hunt at Big Oaks NWR. The refuge can accommodate up to 426 deer hunters each day within the 25,000 acres open to hunting. A total of 5,286 hunter use-days (actual number of hunters during 15 days of deer hunting) took place during the hunt.

Free Fishing Day

Free fishing was offered for **Friday, March 28** from 7:00 a.m. until 4:30 p.m.

Turkey Hunting

Hunt Dates: State drawn turkey hunts will be held **April 23-25** and **April 26-28**. Additional lottery hunts will again be held at the refuge in 2003. On **May 2** at 4:00 a.m. a drawing will be held at the

refuge office for a 2-day hunt on **May 5-6**. On **May 7** at 4:00 p.m., a drawing will be held at the refuge office for a 3-day hunt on **May 8-10**.

Youth Hunt: Special 2-day youth turkey hunts are offered at the refuge each spring. Applications are taken in March. A total of 105 youth (17 or under) are selected by lottery. Drawn youth are notified by mail during the first 2 weeks of April and can attend an optional turkey hunting luncheon and workshop at 1:00 p.m. on **Saturday, May 3** (hosted by the Indiana Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation and Big Oaks Conservation Society) and a 1-day turkey hunt on **Sunday, May 4**. Contact the refuge office for dates and lottery drawing information.



International Migratory

Bird Day

On **Saturday, May 10** the refuge will celebrate International Migratory Day by conducting a May Day count. The May Day count is a spring migratory bird survey administered by the Indiana Audubon Society. Volunteers from around the state conduct the survey during the second Saturday of May. All birds seen or heard within a county during a 24-hour period are recorded. If you would like to volunteer for the survey, call the refuge office.



Take a Kid Fishing Day

The refuge will have its first annual 'take a kid fishing day' on **Saturday, May 31**. Only kids 16 and under and their parents or guardians will be allowed to fish. Visitors will be required to watch the safety video and adults must obtain an annual or daily permit. Fishing will be authorized from 7:00 a.m. until 4:30 p.m. on Old Timbers Lake. All state and federal regulations will apply.



New Map Project

Steve Miller, Fish and Wildlife Service Biologist, and volunteers from Big Oaks Conservation Society are working on a map project that will benefit visitors to Big Oaks. The project will create a 1 to 24,000 scale topographic map of the refuge, which will depict boundaries of the various day-use and hunting areas. The maps will promote safety by giving clear guidance on the boundary areas open to public access. They will hopefully be done this spring, and will be sold by the Big Oaks Conservation Society to raise money for conservation projects at the refuge.

PRIVATE LANDS PROGRAM

Big Oaks NWR provides funding for wildlife habitat restoration projects on private lands through the 'Partners for Fish and Wildlife' (PFW) program, which is a national program administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Voluntary habitat restoration, such as wetland restoration, stream bank renovation, reforestation and native warm season grass reestablishment are among the program's habitat goals. Through the generous interest of our conservation partners, most land improvements and restoration projects are installed at little or NO cost to the landowner. Landowners retain full control of their restored lands, including the right to restrict public access. Completed projects provide landowners and future generations a lifetime of enjoyment.

The vast majority of our nation's wildlife habitat is on private lands. One goal of the refuge is to help private landowners restore or improve habitat so that waterfowl, other birds, fish and endangered species can have a place to live. Refuge biologists give free expert advice and consultation to landowners, conservation groups and state or federal agencies that are interested in improving or restoring wildlife habitat on the lands they own or manage.

Wetland and reforestation projects must be a minimum of 1 acre, while warm season grass projects require at least 5 acres. Restoration projects are designed to compliment surrounding land use, as well as the primary interest of the landowner and adjacent neighbors. Landowners are required to sign an agreement stating that they will not alter or remove the restored habitat for 10 years. However, if a landowner wishes to nullify their agreement during the 10-year period, the landowner will be required to reimburse the government the full cost of the restoration project.



Contact the refuge office if you are interested in restoring native wildlife habitat on your land.

BILL ZIMMERMAN ATTENDS CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION

Wildlife artist, Bill Zimmerman, and his wife, Judy, attended the Big Oaks Centennial Celebration on March 14. Mr. Zimmerman signed free copies of the new 'Indiana National Wildlife Refuges' poster, which features his waterfowl illustrations. Jason Lewis worked with Bill to get the poster produced.



Indiana artist Bill Zimmerman (L), Judy Zimmerman and Jason Lewis at the Big Oaks Centennial Celebration

Big Oaks Hats for Sale



The Big Oaks Conservation Society is selling Big Oaks hats and refuge license plates to raise money for projects that benefit the refuge. The hats are \$12 each. They come in four colors; all tan, tan and green, camouflage, hunter orange. The hats can be purchased at the refuge office. Refuge plates are \$8. Big Oaks Conservation Society members get a 10 % discount.



BIG OAKS CONSERVATION SOCIETY FORMS

During the spring of 2002, the first glimpses of a volunteer “friends of the refuge” group to support Big Oaks National Wildlife Refuge began to take shape. A kick-off picnic and refuge tour were offered. About 20 interested individuals wanting to help support and guide refuge activities attended. They began to meet monthly to develop the non-profit Big Oaks Conservation Society, or BOCS. The Muscatatuck Wildlife Society applied for and received a National Fish and Wildlife Foundation start-up grant for the new group. BOCS now has a board of directors, officers, and working committees. The group’s mission is to: support the goals of wildlife conservation and habitat restoration at Big Oaks NWR, develop environmental education programs, enhance public awareness, encourage use and appreciation for the natural and cultural assets unique to Big Oaks. They are already doing amazing things in support of the refuge and hope to continue to grow and offer the community a chance to improve the refuge experience.

The new group is seeking members to support a variety of activities. Money was raised by selling food at the fall deer hunts. They have also designed Big Oaks hats to sell. The money helps fund future projects. BOCS members will also be assisting with Centennial activities at the refuge. The first event was the Centennial time capsule dedication. BOCS members provided a free fish dinner for participants. Meetings are usually held on the first Monday of each month. If you have an interest in Big Oaks National Wildlife Refuge, and would like to receive future issues of this bi-annual newsletter, please consider an annual membership in the Big Oaks Conservation Society. You can contact them at bocs_collier@hotmail.com. A mail-in membership form can be found on page 11.



BOCS members attending February meeting



Refuge Manager, Joe Robb (L), presenting Dustin Varble with “Volunteer of the Year” Award for 2002

VOLUNTEER APPRECIATION DINNER and AWARDS

Big Oaks NWR held its annual Volunteer Appreciation Dinner on Friday, February 7, 2003 at The Pines restaurant in Madison. Volunteers of 2002, Big Oaks Conservation Society members, and refuge staff attended. “Volunteer of the Year” award was presented to Dustin Varble for contributing nearly 500 volunteer hours at the refuge. He conducted a study on burying beetles. Volunteers, George Tilley and Jeffrey Skirvin, were honored with special recognition in appreciation for their refuge work with the “Experience Works” program. Other individuals recognized for their many hours of volunteer work included Dale Sides, Amy Sayler, and Beth Schaefer.



Volunteers George Tilley (L) and Jeffrey Skirvin



Boy Scouts Paul Swango, Jimmy Leveille, & Nick Rayburn mounting bluebird boxes along perimeter roads

Local Scouts Install Bluebird and Barn Owl Nesting Boxes

Two Boy Scouts, brothers who are members of Troop 607 in Versailles, Indiana, recently completed Eagle Scout service projects at Big Oaks National Wildlife Refuge. Jimmy Leveille, age 15, and his brother Kenny, age 13, both approached U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologist Teresa Vanosdol with proposals to increase nesting habitat for targeted species at Big Oaks. She suggested bluebird boxes could be used along the Big Oaks perimeter roads, which are ideal mounting sites because of existing telephone poles near the mowed, grassy areas bluebirds prefer. With donated materials, fellow scouts helped build 25 boxes. In the spring, Ms. Vanosdol escorted a group of scouts to hang the boxes along the east and west perimeter roads. Jimmy also built a kestrel box as an experiment to see if the small falcon could be induced to nest in specific locations. The bluebird boxes have been a big hit, according to Dr. Joseph Robb, Big Oaks Refuge Manager. Bluebirds used virtually all of the boxes, including the one located only twenty yards from the Big Oaks office.

When Jimmy's younger brother, Kenny, asked if there were any other refuge species to provide with "custom housing". Teresa suggested the refuge would like to provide nesting sites for the state endangered Barn Owl. The Barn Owl, so named because it frequently nests in barns and similar structures, has been sited in the refuge, but is rare in Southern Indiana. Abandoned observation towers and ammunition bunkers provide the dark, barn-like structures that may prove attractive to the owls. Barn owls nest year round except for the month of

January. This provided Kenny with a specific date for installing the boxes. Ken also obtained donated materials and went to work building seven of the large plywood boxes. Again the whole troop helped assemble the boxes. In January the scouts were taken to locations in the refuge to locate the boxes in places most likely to attract the reclusive owls. They installed the boxes in remote sites away from high-use areas. Only time will tell if the well-built structures will result in more barn owls cruising the night skies of Big Oaks. All are optimistic they will be as successful as the earlier bluebird project.



Scout Kenny Leveille installing barn owl box in bunker

School Project at the Refuge

Madison Consolidated School's AP biology class and honors ninth grade biology class have had the opportunity to conduct research at the refuge in association with Miami University (OH) and the National Science Foundation. They studied and compared the genetic diversity of sugar maple trees along the western edge of a forested area to that of the interior of the forested area. They identified and collected maple leaves, processed them and ran extracts through a gel electrophoresis machine to look at protein structure. They did not statistically find any difference between the two areas in diversity. This research can be applied to real life, because forests are fragmented greatly from urban development. This research can be applied to determine the minimal size of forest required to maintain its health and biodiversity. Without a diverse biotic community, many organisms could not survive, including humans.

REFUGE CENTENNIAL EVENT at BIG OAKS



BOCS provides a Centennial Celebration fish dinner

To commemorate the 100th anniversary of the National Wildlife Refuge System, Big Oaks held a Centennial Celebration on Friday, March 14. A Centennial Time Capsule was dedicated and the Big Oaks Conservation Society provided a fish dinner for visitors that evening.



Items to be included in the Centennial Time Capsule



Blowing out candles on the Centennial Cake

Commemorating a Pivotal Moment in History

March 14, 2003 marked a milestone in the history of wildlife conservation in America- the Centennial anniversary of the National Wildlife Refuge System. The National Wildlife Refuge System is America's only network of federal lands dedicated specifically to wildlife conservation. President Theodore Roosevelt created this legacy in 1903 when he set aside tiny Pelican Island on Florida's East Coast as a refuge for birds. From there the National Wildlife Refuge System grew and now includes more than 530 refuges and thousands of waterfowl production areas, spanning nearly 100 million acres across the United States and its territories.

America's National Wildlife Refuge System

Celebrating a Century of Conservation

A Network of Wildlife Homes

This vast network of prime habitats gives endangered species a chance to recover, provides stepping-stones for millions of migrating birds, and protects premier fisheries. The National Wildlife Refuge System safeguards plants and animals of virtually every variety, from cactus to caribou, butterflies to bison, and salmon to songbirds.

For People Too!

Our National Wildlife Refuge System provides places for all to enjoy the wonders of the outdoors and ensures wild, open space for future generations. More than 35 million Americans visit national wildlife refuges each year. Visitors include school children, hunters, anglers, bird watchers and others who come just to savor the solitude of these special places. Still, the majority of Americans have yet to discover their National Wildlife Refuge System.

MEET THE STAFF

Joe Robb - Refuge Manager

I oversee the staff and direct work on the refuge (which is easy at Big Oaks NWR, because we have a talented, productive staff). I am involved in community outreach and in regional conservation initiatives. I have a B.S. in Forestry (wildlife management option) from Purdue University and a M.S. and a PhD in Zoology from The Ohio State University (aka the NCAA football National Champions!). I have worked at Muscatatuck, Reelfoot Lake, and Ottawa NWR's. I also was detailed to Laccasine and Sabine NWR's, and the Region 4 USFWS Office. I graduated from the Federal Law Enforcement Academy in 1988, and I am a certified burn boss III for prescribed fire. My primary interest is in conservation biology and I have a love of wildlife research. I recently bought a historic 1840 house in Vernon with my fiancé, Amber, that we are currently restoring. I have an 18 year old son, Jason, who is a high school senior. I am originally from Marion, Indiana.

Steve Miller - Refuge Operations Specialist

I oversee the fire program at the refuge and most maintenance contracts. I have an Associate Degree from Hocking College in Ohio and a Bachelors Degree from Purdue University. I have worked at Big Oaks NWR since 1997. I worked for the USFWS in Sacramento, California Ecological Services Office in 1996-1997. I have also worked for Colorado State University's Center for Ecological Management of Military Lands at Yakima Training Center in Yakima Washington, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Bloomington, Indiana Ecological Services Office, U.S. Army as a forestry technician at Jefferson Proving Ground prior to its closure and I was in the Marine Corps for 4 years. I currently live in Vallonia, Indiana. My wife, Melody, worked in Bloomington and I work here so we needed to split the distance. Have a son, Judd, who was born April 2002. I am originally from Switzerland County and grew up near Pleasant.

Jason P. Lewis – Wildlife Biologist

I am a Wildlife Biologist responsible for wildlife and habitat management activities conducted on the refuge. I coordinate the private lands biology program, perform community outreach, and I am the Centennial Coordinator. I am a federal law enforcement officer and wildland firefighter. I have a B.S. in Psychology (focus animal behavior) and M.S. in Biology from Ball State University. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service hired me in 1998 while I was completing my graduate degree. I started out as a volunteer at Muscatatuck National Wildlife Refuge in 1994. I graduated from the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center in 2000. I was detailed to Washington D.C. and St. Louis, MO as a law enforcement officer assigned to guard against potential terrorist activities. I grew up in Jennings County, less than a half mile from the northwest boundary of the refuge, near Nebraska, IN. I live in Madison on Jefferson Proving Ground. I enjoy bird watching, photography, and just about any sport. I am the assistant

girls track coach at Madison High School where I coach long distance runners.

Teresa Vanosdol -Wildlife Biologist

I assist in conducting biological studies on the refuge. Current studies involve confirming the presence of bobcat on the refuge and assisting Ball State University graduate student, Kirk Roth, with a Cerulean warbler habitat and productivity study. I have a Bachelor of Science Degree (Wildlife option) and a Masters of Science Degree in Biology from Ball State University, Muncie, IN. I worked as a biological field technician during the summers of graduate school in West Virginia and Virginia, in addition to collecting data for my thesis on the "diet and nest-site selection of the yellow-billed cuckoo". I began my career with the Service by volunteering my time at Muscatatuck National Wildlife Refuge in Seymour, IN. I became an employee of the USFWS in April of 1998 when I was hired as a biological field technician at Big Oaks NWR. Hobbies include reading, drawing, writing, running, and various other sports.

Janet Pike – Administrative Technician

I try to make life a little easier for the rest of the staff. I have worked for the Federal Government for 25 years - nineteen years with Naval Ordnance Station in Louisville, KY and five years with Fort Campbell, KY. I am married to Rusty, and am the youngest of eleven children. I'm from Louisville, where my heart still belongs.



FIRE PROGRAM STAFF

Brian Winters - Prescribed Fire Specialist

I lead Prescribed Fire activities at Big Oaks and assist with Prescribed Fire activities within Region 3. I also participate in wildfire efforts around the country. Past work history includes working as an intern for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service at St. Marks NWR in Florida 1994, Assistant Land Manager at Tall Timbers Research Station in Tallahassee, Florida 1995 and Foschallee Plantation in Tallahassee, Florida in 1996, Forestry Technician/Firefighter 1997-2001 at St. Marks NWR, Prescribed Fire Specialist for Big Oak NWR 2001-2003. I graduated from Hocking College with an Associate Degree in Wildlife Management in 1993. I currently live in Hanover, Indiana with my wife, Elizabeth, and our 3½-year-old son, Clate. We are building a house on Wolf Run Road northeast of Madison

Laura Lake - Fire Program Technician

I assist Brian, the prescribed fire specialist, in writing burn plans, preparing for controlled burns on the refuge, and carrying out the burns. I also fight wildfires during the fire season. I have a M.S. in Wildlife Management from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN, and a B.S. in Biology from Marian College, Indianapolis, IN. I worked as an intern at Big Oaks, at the time it was JPG, during the summer of 1999. I am now living with my husband, Ray, and two dogs in Harrison, OH. We're originally from Brookville, IN. Hopefully we can move closer soon.

Eric Suttles - Range Technician

My duties as a member of the fire crew include preparing for and conducting prescribed burns on Big Oaks NWR and other refuges. I am also a wild land fire fighter and help suppress wildfires as needed. I have an A.S from St. Gregory's Univ. in Natural Science and a B.S in Wildlife and Fisheries Ecology from Oklahoma State Univ. Since graduation I have held internships at the Noble Foundation, Sulfur fish hatchery, and with a U.S Senator. I am originally from Oklahoma and call the prairies home. Working a Big Oaks is Great. However, I do get a little claustrophobic when I am up north on the refuge among the trees.

Amv Savler - Permanent Seasonal Range Technician

This is a job encompassing a wide variety of duties. We set prescribed fires on the refuge, maintain and repair our fire equipment, and go out west in the summers to fight wild land fires. I graduated last May ('02) from Hanover College with a B.A. in biology. During that summer I was an intern at Big Oaks. I am originally from Indianapolis, IN. My family includes an older sister, younger brother, and my parents. I would like to get a cat or dog.

Dale Sides - Permanent Seasonal Firefighter

Besides firefighting duties on the refuge, I also help with any refuge-related activities. I am also able to go out west on wildfires in the summer. Most of my firefighting qualifications came through classes I attended through Big Oaks and as a fire brigade member at the factory where I worked. I worked at a factory job for 30 years out of necessity. Now that I am retired, this is something I can do because I enjoy it (and I do, immensely). I am married to my wonderful wife, Liz, and live on a farm, which I manage for wildlife habitat and my wife's two horses.

Interns at Big Oaks

My name is **Diana Shuler** and I am from Waynesville, Ohio. I graduated in 1998 from The Ohio State University with a B.S. in Wildlife Management. Most of my previous work experiences have involved working with endangered species, including my most recent job at an environmental consulting firm, where I was responsible for leading survey efforts for the federally endangered Indiana bat. My next position will begin here at Big Oaks as a range technician.

My fellow intern, **Helen Yeh**, is from Vancouver, Canada. She recently graduated from the University of British Columbia with a B.S. in life and earth sciences. Helen's past volunteer experiences have all been in the field of ornithology, including her last internship in Canada, during which she assisted with a study of tree swallows at Long Point Bird Observatory. Helen will be moving to Texas soon to start working with The Nature Conservancy on a golden-cheeked warbler study at Fort Hood.

We have been field interns at Big Oaks NWR since fall 2002. It has been a rewarding experience for both of us. As interns, we received free housing and a modest subsistence to help cover expenses. Together we have been accomplishing many things. We started our internships at the beginning of the refuge deer season, during which we assisted checking hunters in and out of the refuge. We also helped run the refuge deer check-in station, where we were able to age and sex deer, as well as take samples for chronic wasting disease testing. Since then we have spent a lot of our time surveying for bobcats and other species including deer and saw-whet owls. Although we have not located any bobcats or saw-whet owls as of yet, our deer census efforts have been very successful, as we have located and counted numerous deer on the refuge during our surveys. In addition, we have also spent many hours proofing the data from four years of breeding bird research. Helen has especially been concentrating a significant amount of her time proofing and editing the data. She has realized how very important it is to keep all the field data organized, and have the data entered as soon as possible. I have been working on putting together a general brochure for the refuge, which will hopefully be sent for printing soon. During this winter, we have been working on our basic wild land firefighter training and learning different techniques and tools used during fires. Overall, our experience at Big Oaks has been very beneficial and we will both take with us knowledge that will help us in our future endeavors.

Jessica Griffiths was also an intern until the end of hunting season. She has moved on to California for another internship position. She is from Glen Ellyn, Illinois and attended Wellsley College. She has worked primarily in ornithology, and is now banding birds at Big Sur Bird Observatory, as part of a study on resident species.



Interns Helen Yeh (L) and Diana Shuler

BIG OAKS at CENTENNIAL REFUGE FRIENDS CONFERENCE

The national kick-off for the 100th anniversary of the National Wildlife Refuge System took place at the Refuge Friends Conference in Washington, D.C. on February 1, 2003. The conference was hosted by the National Wildlife Refuge Association (NWRA) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). The NWRA was established to support the Refuge System and includes a diverse group of sponsoring organizations, ranging from the Audubon Society to the National Geographic Society to the National Rifle Association.

Participants in the conference were primarily USFWS personnel and members of refuge “friends” groups. Attendees from **Big Oaks National Wildlife Refuge** were refuge manager Dr. Joseph Robb, Big Oaks Conservation Society (BOCS) President Rick Collier, Director Jim Leveille and BOCS “friends” member Sara Leveille. Some of the sessions attended were Fundraising, Basic Group Skills, Environmental Education, and Growing Your Membership. Conference participants were treated to speeches by Washington officials, including remarks by Gale Norton, Secretary of the U.S. Department of the Interior, Steve Williams, Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and William Hartwig, the new Chief of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

The conference highlighted the importance of “friends” groups to the National Wildlife Refuge System. Hundreds of thousands of hours of donated time and fundraising carried out by “friends” groups all over the nation have made a tremendous contribution to refuge activities. BOCS President Rick Collier called the conference “great training” and hopes to integrate many of the ideas shared at the conference into Big Oaks Conservation Society activities in the coming months.



Sara Leveille, Jim Leveille, USFWS Director Steve Williams, Rick Collier, Dr. Joe Robb



Sara Leveille, Interior Secretary Gale Norton, Jim Leveille



Sara and Jim Leveille, NWRS Chief William Hartwig, Rick Collier

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Amy Saylor - Firefighter

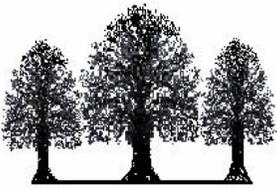
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 Newsletter

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BIG OAKS
 Conservation
 Society

Membership
Benefits

Discount on Refuge
 "Friends" Merchandise
 (10%)

Opportunities to Participate
 in Special Refuge Events

Contribute to the
 Improvement of the Refuge
 for all Visitors

Big Oaks Newsletter

If you would like to join the **Big Oaks Conservation Society**, please fill out this membership form and send along with your check to:

Big Oaks Conservation Society
P.O. Box 935
Madison, IN 47250

Yearly Membership Form (Oct. to Oct.) Please select a category.

<input type="checkbox"/> Youth \$5	Name _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Individual \$15	Address _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Family \$25	City _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Supporting \$25	State/Zip _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Charter (Inaugural Year) \$100	Phone _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Lifetime \$150	E-mail _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Corporate \$500	

2003 CALENDAR of EVENTS

March	Centennial Celebration, Prescribed Burns
April	Refuge Opens to Public Use Apr. 18, Old Timbers Lake Fishing
May	Youth Turkey Hunt, Wild Turkey Hunt, May Day Bird Count, Migratory Bird Day, Take a Kid Fishing Day
June	Breeding Bird Surveys
July	Butterfly Count
August	Visit the refuge & fish in the shade
September	Migration Begins!
October	Deer Archery Season
November	Deer Shotgun Season, Youth Deer Hunt
December	Christmas Bird Count



BIG OAKS

**Conservation Society
P.O. Box 935
Madison, IN 47250**

2002-2003 Board Members

Rick Collier, President
Dan Herron, Vice President
Kirsten Carlson, Secretary and
Business Manager
Bill Poindexter, Treasurer
Joe Robb, Executive Secretary
John Moody, Board Member
Jim Leveille, Board Member
Jeanne Dugle, Board Member

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