

**Twin Lakes Birding Trail Report – Rice Lake National Wildlife Refuge, McGregor, MN**

In November of 2019, the Friends of Rice Lake National Wildlife Refuge (Friends) began discussing the concept of creating a self-guided birding trail for novice birders and school age children. We decided to pursue a Savaloja Grant from the MN Ornithological Union (MOU), to enhance the project. We applied in January of 2020 and in March were informed that we were successful in receiving a Savaloja Grant for \$1,035!

Many brainstorming sessions ensued which produced some great ideas, including working with local tribal members to provide the Ojibwe names of birds on the signage. Rice Lake and the surrounding lands have a rich history of Native American usage dating back thousands of years; so, it is an important aspect and partnership in this project.

The onset of COVID 19 slowed our progress in terms of meeting and communicating within the Friends group and with our Refuge and Tribal partners. During this time our group worked on sign text, native bird names, and acquiring photos. We went through numerous edits until we had a final draft to submit to our designer, Kollath Graphic Design in Duluth, MN. There were several edits during this process as well, but we finalized the 13 signs in November of 2022. The sign files were sent to Voss Signs and the completed signs were delivered in early April of 2023. The price break for a discount was 25 signs, so we ordered two sets (26) and Long Lake Conservation Center, a residential environmental learning center operated by Aitkin County, purchased the second set of 13 for educational use on their campus.

Due to the long history of Native American use at Rice Lake the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe - Tribal Historic Preservation Office (THPO) was contacted to observe the digging of the post holes. A THPO cultural resource technician was on-site on May 24 to observe. We completed sign installation on May 31, 2023.

The birding trail is located near Twin Lakes and utilizes an established parking area and existing trails. There are 13 habitat stops. Six (6) are located along a paved, accessible trail and seven (7) along a natural, hard surface trail; providing opportunities for a diversity of users.

Prior to officially opening the trail we must create a “welcome” sign near the entrance with a site map of the trail and acknowledgements to those people and organizations that contributed to its development.

Our goal for the trail is to provides users with an introductory understanding of birds and their habitats and give them a small sample of the local Native American culture. Our hope is that it inspires a diverse group of users to support protection and preservation of both.

Project expenses to date:

Kollath Graphic Design	= \$ 820.00
Voss Signs	= \$ 591.85
Treated 4x4 signposts	= \$ 240.15
<b>Total</b>	<b>= \$ 1,652.00</b>



Luther Sam – MLBO THPO checking for cultural resources.



Installing Posts and signage at 13 habitat stops



Donna Crider, Walt Ford, Judd Brink



Donna Crider, Mark Jacobs, Judd Brink

