

ENHANCE. EXPAND. ENJOY.



5/1/2016

The Nature Conservancy's Great Egret Marsh Preserve

The Great Egret Marsh Preserve was purchased and protected by The Nature Conservancy in 2013. Without conservation action, the opportunity to protect and restore important coastal marshland located here would have been lost. Thanks to the dedication of partners and supporters, the 155-acre preserve is becoming a quiet coastal refuge for people and nature, reminding us how precious undeveloped land is along Lake Erie. However, the improvements needed at the preserve illustrate the challenges of restoring lands like these to quality fish and wildlife habitat. We invite you to get involved with the Conservancy's efforts to enhance and expand migratory bird habitat at Great Egret Marsh Preserve and other stops along Lake Erie, and to enjoy the rewarding benefits of their conservation.

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THE NATURE CONSERVANCY'S GREAT EGRET MARSH PRESERVE

Enhancing Habitat for Migratory Birds and Other Wildlife

In 2015 The Nature Conservancy reforested the old agricultural field at Great Egret Marsh Preserve with more than 10,000 native tree and 5,000 native shrub species. Included in the plantings were hackberry, redbud, various oaks, and bird-friendly shrub species such as ninebark and elderberry. As these plantings grow, what once was an area with little wildlife benefit will become 55 acres of restored, diverse migratory bird habitat, enhancing the surrounding coastal landscape and improving the retention of nutrients and sediments in the soil that would otherwise wash into Lake Erie during rain events. However, the presence of non-native plants remains a challenge and threatens to overtake the native plantings without proper management. With your support, the Conservancy is able to ensure these plantings receive the attention they need to thrive and provide optimal habitat for migrating birds and other wildlife.



Trees and shrubs anxiously awaiting planting at Great Egret Marsh Preserve in April 2015

Within the two impounded wetlands, enhancements are being made that will allow us to have greater control over the water levels and also provide habitat improvements. For years, non-native carp have had unfettered access to the wetlands and consequently there is now very little wetland vegetation in Great Egret Marsh Preserve. Healthy marsh vegetation is essential. It supports the insects that birds and fish depend upon and protects the shoreline from wind and wave erosion. By June 2016, the Conservancy will have new water control mechanisms in place at Great Egret Marsh Preserve, making the rejuvenation of these wetlands a reality. These mechanisms will include barriers to prevent the entry of non-native carp, which uproot tender

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vegetation and muddy the waters, causing devastating impacts to marsh habitat. They also will allow the Conservancy the ability to change water depths within the marsh to accommodate the various needs of wildlife there.

Though improvements have been made and other habitat restoration activities are being planned for the preserve, much still needs to be done in the ongoing and long-term effort to thwart the non-native vegetation that pervades the preserve and surrounding landscape. Restoring the degraded areas of Great Egret Marsh Preserve to thriving wildlife habitat will require considerable time and resources. The Conservancy's ability to effectively conserve and enhance migratory bird habitat is made possible by the support of those who appreciate nature and all that it has to offer. With additional support, we have the opportunity to make several additional habitat improvements at Great Egret Marsh Preserve:

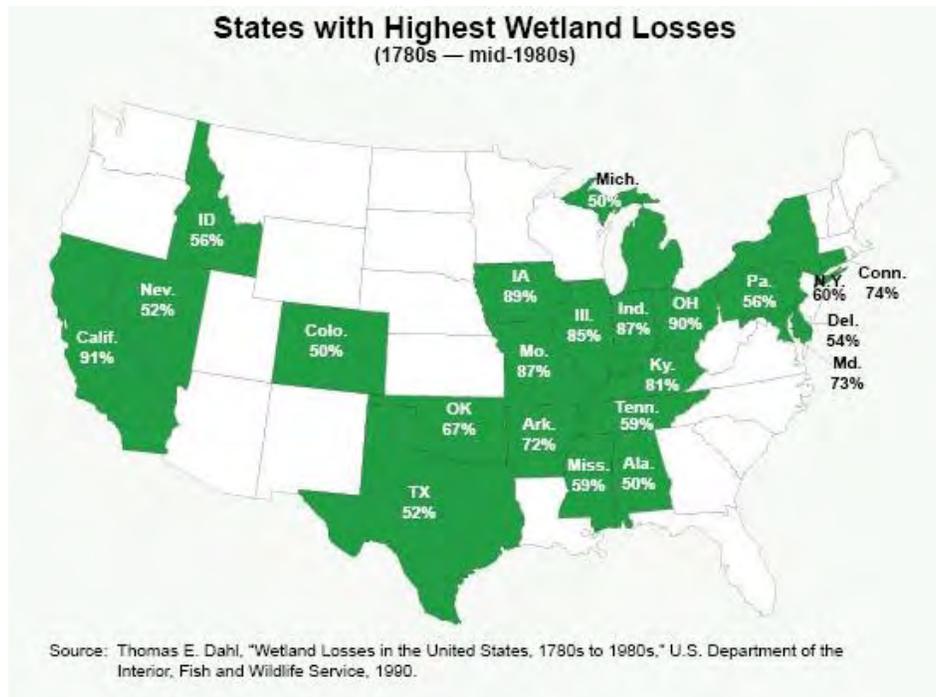
- ❖ Removal of non-native plants and replacement of native shrub habitat between the agricultural field/reforestation site and wetland impoundments
- ❖ Removal of non-native plants and replacement of native grassland and pollinator habitat adjacent to West Harbor
- ❖ Continued stewardship of native habitat at Great Egret Marsh Preserve
- ❖ Installation of osprey nesting platform on West Harbor



Native tree and shrub plantings in the old agricultural field at Great Egret Marsh Preserve

Expanding Natural Habitat along Coastal Lake Erie

Ohio's Coastal Lake Erie consists of over 80% hardened shorelines which are mostly developed and armored with stone or steel. These shorelines provide little-to-no habitat for migratory birds. While shorebirds such as the spotted sandpiper have adapted to using the stoned shoreline, most birds and other wildlife find these "dead zones" inhospitable. Add to this that Ohio has lost over 90% of its natural wetlands, which provide important benefits like improving water quality and supporting habitat for fish and other species, and it's easy to see the need for increased restoration and protection of Lake Erie's coastal habitat.



Situated at the confluence of the Atlantic and Mississippi Flyways, Coastal Lake Erie was historically and remains today very important to migrating birds. Development of coastal lands poses a real threat to natural habitat and its restoration. Protecting lands from development often involves their purchase, which is both a necessary and costly endeavor. Buying land and restoring natural areas are an essential part of the Conservancy's mission to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends. The act of protecting land is often the most visible action in a complex chain of essential activities necessary to successfully expand native habitat. This work includes the identification of high priority areas for protection, working with landowners and partners, and completing ecological inventories and invasive species and habitat mapping, among other actions. When we purchase land along Lake Erie or work with partners to protect and expand this native habitat, we do so with a keen attention to protecting areas that will provide the most meaningful outcomes for people and wildlife. Opportunities for protection and restoration are important for building the network of migratory bird stopover sites that are needed for successful migration and reproduction.

Enjoyment of our Natural Treasures

The Conservancy welcomes wildlife enthusiasts to its many preserves that are open for public visitation to experience, explore and enjoy nature. The Great Egret Marsh Preserve provides visitors with access to a variety of upland and wetland habitats along with the ability to witness restoration in progress. The preserve features 1.5 miles of walking trails and a canoe/kayak launch into West Harbor. Bird by boat or along one of our hiking trails. If your timing is right, you might just witness the preserve's namesake, a great egret, take flight. Stop by often to see your support at work and enjoy the many benefits of a coastal refuge in the making.



Bird-watching enthusiasts key in on a blackpoll warbler during spring migration at Great Egret Marsh Preserve

YOU Can Support Migratory Birds at Great Egret Marsh Preserve and Beyond!

By donating funds through The Biggest Week in American Birding, you are helping the Conservancy continue the restoration of Great Egret Marsh Preserve for migratory birds. There are still areas where invasive plants are threatening the quality of this habitat and where improvements to habitat through additional plantings could be made. Your donation will help us plant desirable trees and shrubs while also managing non-native plant growth at the marsh. This crucial work comes at a cost; non-native plant management bears a cost of \$200 per acre and native tree plantings require at least \$2,600 per acre. The Conservancy, its supporters, and partners have already reforested 55 acres, but need your help to realize improvements across the 155-acre preserve.

Additionally, your donations can help the Conservancy expand the footprint of protected lands and increase the number of migratory bird stopover sites along Lake Erie. Protecting lands like Great Egret Marsh Preserve in key locations ensures that birds can bridge the distance between stopover sites and arrive at their wintering or breeding destinations in optimal condition. It also ensures that resident birds and other wildlife have a place to call home that is protected forever from development or other harmful alterations.

The Conservancy, as a non-profit, relies upon the support of donors to achieve these costly, yet important improvements. Together, we can turn Great Egret Marsh Preserve into extraordinary stopover habitat for migratory birds and also expand the footprint of protected lands within the coastal Lake Erie landscape!