

Bayfield County Success from the Field

Creating Wetland Habitat at the Oulu Cultural and Heritage Center

Background

Duane Lahti, of Oulu in Bayfield County, Wisconsin, received funding through the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) for wetland habitat restoration in spring 2019.

The GLRI is a task force of 11 federal agencies helping landowners to plan and implement activities to improve and protect the natural resources in locally identified watersheds within the GLRI states. With a 29 year career as a Department of Natural Resources biologist and spending the last 9 years as a watershed supervisor for the Lake Superior Basin, Lahti knows the importance of preserving wetlands in the Great Lakes region.

In 1904, Lahti’s maternal grandparents moved to the property where the Oulu Cultural and Heritage Center now stands. Lahti obtained the farm from his aunt in 1997. “My uncle’s tractor would get stuck in this field, which was always marginal farmland. Even back then, it was reverting back and becoming hydric,” stated Lahti.



Field prior to wetland restoration.

Program Successes

In the early 1900s, Lahti’s ancestors cleared the land by hand and with horses, converting the forested wetlands and sedge meadows to agricultural farm fields. NRCS restored the wetland by constructing a 3- by 850-ft earthen embankment to collect runoff water into excavations of varying depths, creating diverse habitat for aquatic plants and animals. A habitat component, funded by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, was added which included sand areas for turtle nesting habitat, a linear mound with tree snags and rock clusters for additional habitat. The embankment was seeded and mulched and will be used as a walkway for educational tours.



Turtle habitat—tree snag, rock and sand.



Duane Lahti on the wetland restoration embankment.

Future Plans

The wetland project borders the cluster of buildings comprising the Oulu Cultural and Heritage Center. Visit their website, www.ouluculturalcenter.org, for more information. The center partners with the South Shore School District for three weeks of summer school programming. The new wetlands will enable expansion of the summer science curriculum. Over the next year as the wetlands are restored, Lahti and the center will be documenting the transformation to use in future educational programs for summer school and the general public.

Wisconsin Natural Resources Conservation Service

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