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US Army Corps of Engineers
Rock Island District

Information Paper

M2. Forestry Management– Emiquon West, IL

Upper Mississippi River System - Navigation and Ecosystem Sustainability Program

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Location/Description

The program area comprises the Upper Mississippi River System, as defined by Congress in the Water Resources Development Act of 1986 (WRDA 1986), which includes the Upper Mississippi River from Minneapolis, Minnesota, to Cairo, Illinois; the Illinois Waterway from Chicago to Grafton, Illinois; and navigable portions of the Minnesota, St. Croix, Black and Kaskaskia Rivers. This multi-use resource supports an extensive navigation system (made up of 1200 miles of 9 foot channel and 37 lock and dam sites), a diverse ecosystem (2.7 million acres of habitat supporting hundreds of fish and wildlife species), floodplain agriculture, recreation and tourism. Based on the recommendation of the recently completed UMR-IWW System Navigation Feasibility Study that examined system needs over the next 50 years, the Navigation and Ecosystem Sustainability Program (NESP) was implemented to achieve the dual purposes of UMRS ecosystem restoration and navigation improvements. Forestry Management at Emiquon West is one of 23 initial NESP ecological component projects being implemented under this new UMRS program.

Floodplain habitats are integral components of large river ecosystems because of the unique habitat they provide. The Emiquon West project offers the opportunity to restore high quality floodplain habitats including wet prairie, moist soil, and bottomland hardwood forest for wildlife and aquatic species. The Emiquon West project would link with The Nature Conservancy's adjacent restoration project to provide a corridor of high quality bottomland hardwood forest habitat transitioning to a floodplain wet prairie and moist soil habitat that would connect the bluff to the floodplain, resulting in landscape scale restoration.

Problem Statement

Beginning in the 1920s, anthropogenic changes to the landscape have severely altered the topography, plant community, and drainage patterns of the project area. In order to convert the project area to agricultural production, the existing bottomland hardwood forest was clearcut, the surrounding creeks were channelized, and multiple flood protection levees were constructed. Runoff control ditches were constructed on the interior of the levee district, and drain tiles were installed. Native vegetation was replaced with row crops. This resulted in substantial loss of fish and wildlife habitat and declines in floodplain ecosystem services. Loss and degradation of this habitat also resulted in declining populations of waterfowl and other migratory birds.

Current Status

The Project Implementation Report activities and plan formulation will be continued as funding allows based on the results of a hydrogeomorphic assessment of the site which was completed last fiscal year.

Authority

The Water Resources Development Act of 2007, TITLE VIII Upper Mississippi River and Illinois Waterway System, authorized the project.