

St. Louis River Estuary: Allouez Bay

Audubon Great Lakes is working across the Great Lakes region to restore marsh bird habitat

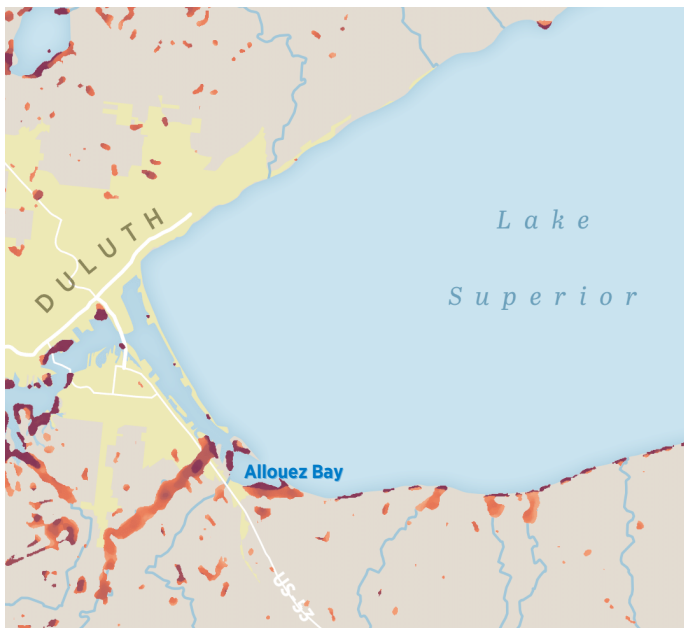
Photo credit: Kelly Beaster/Lake Superior Research Institute

Protecting and Restoring Marsh Birds in the St. Louis River Estuary

RECOVERING POPULATIONS OF NATIVE BIRDS IMPORTANT TO THE GREAT LAKES

The St. Louis River Estuary, an Important Bird Area, supports exceptional bird diversity during migration and nesting seasons. More than 240 bird species have been recorded within the estuary, and its numerous bays, islands, wetlands, barrier beaches, and forested areas provide diverse habitat for breeding birds and birds that are migrating through. Many of these species are facing steep population declines. Black Terns, once common in Allouez Bay, have not bred in the estuary since the 1990s.

Audubon developed a spatial prioritization tool to identify the most important Great Lakes coastal wetlands for 14 species of marsh birds. The St. Louis River Estuary is one of twelve highest priority regions for Audubon where we are working with partners to coordinate landscape-scale bird monitoring and habitat restoration.



American Bittern. Photo Credit: Diana Taylor

RESTORING MARSH BIRD POPULATIONS

Great Lakes populations of breeding marsh birds have declined significantly over the past 30 years, with some species having exhibited overall declines of 80%. Breeding marsh bird species include American Bittern, Least Bittern, Black Tern, and Yellow-headed Blackbird, all of which are Wisconsin Species of Greatest Conservation Need. These marsh birds depend on a unique habitat complex commonly referred to as hemi-marsh, which has disappeared across the Great Lakes region in parallel with population declines of these species. Hemi-marsh is roughly an equal mix of open water and emergent wetland cover, also characterized by a mix of emergent and aquatic vegetation that generates large amounts of edge habitat where water meets vegetation.

Improved habitat conditions and the response of marsh bird species at Allouez Bay will inform conservation action across the St. Louis River Estuary and Great Lakes region.





Photo credit: Tom Prestby

Restoring Hemi-Marsh Habitat

RESTORING STRUCTURAL DIVERSITY TO IMPROVE MARSH HEALTH AND WILDLIFE POPULATIONS

Audubon Great Lakes and partners are working to restore emergent marsh within Allouez Bay back to more structurally diverse and hemi-marsh conditions. All project activities are aimed at establishing native and more diverse wetland plants that improve the suitability of this priority wetland for flora and fauna of high conservation need. Audubon is utilizing breeding marsh bird surveys, vegetation surveys, aerial photography, and expert input to plan restoration with partners. Restoration work will include the removal of dominant invasive plant species (e.g. narrow-leaf cattail, Phragmites, reed canary grass), seeding and planting native species, digging of channels and potholes, and potentially additional depth contouring or island creation that support resiliency to rapidly changing water levels and increased storm activity. Ecological restoration will coincide with improvements to the site that benefit recreationists such as fisherfolk, hunters and kayakers.



Black Tern. Photo credit: Mark Stensaas

Establishing Community Science

FILLING DATA GAPS IN THE ST. LOUIS RIVER ESTUARY

Audubon and partners are working to establish a self-sustained community science initiative in the St. Louis River Estuary. Are you interested in exploring new areas and contributing to our knowledge of the area? If so, we want YOU to join the project! Our goal is to fill data gaps in non-surveyed and under-birded locations by submitting data to eBird hotspots. There are also opportunities to join partner-led expert-guided bird walks, trainings, and other events such as habitat cleanup days.

Collaboration With Partners

Planning, monitoring, restoration, and engagement efforts for this project involve a diverse group of partners, including:

- Wisconsin DNR
- Minnesota Land Trust
- University of Minnesota-Duluth Natural Resources Research Institute (NRRRI)
- Northern Institute of Applied Climate Science
- Friends of Lake Superior Reserve
- City of Superior
- Douglas County
- Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa
- UW-Superior/Lake Superior Research Institute
- St Croix Chippewa Indians of Wisconsin
- Duluth Audubon Society
- Chequamegon Audubon Society

Learn more at glaudubon.org

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