NATURAL RESOURCE DAMAGE ASSESSMENT
PROPOSED RESTORATION PROJECT:

MOIST-SOIL MANAGEMENT UNIT
MAZONIA-BRAIDWOOD STATE FISH AND WILDLIFE AREA
WILL COUNTY, ILLINOIS

I. Introduction

Due to NRDA action taken by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) and Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA) as Natural Resource Trustees, with legal representation by the Office of the Attorney General (AGO), Commonwealth Edison (ComEd) agreed to compensate the public for natural resource injuries resulting from the release of diesel fuel and related hazardous substances to the perimeter ditch of the ComEd facility and associated wetland near Braidwood, Illinois. The settlement, entered in the Northern District Court on April 30, 2002, provided approximately $4,700, earmarked as Natural Resource Restoration funds.

Releases of hazardous substances and oil into our environment can pose a threat to natural resources as well as to people. Natural resources are plants, animals, land, air, water, groundwater, drinking water supplies, and other similar resources. Federal law provides a mechanism, a Natural Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA), to allow Natural Resource Trustees to seek compensation for natural resources injured due to releases of hazardous substances or oil. This notice describes a release and how the Illinois Natural Resource Trustees propose to compensate for the loss of natural resources.

The IDNR and IEPA, invite the public to comment on the proposed restoration project plan.

II. Incident Description

On June 25, 2000, a faulty outdoor oil-water separator in combination with a bout of heavy rainfall washed approximately 4,450 gallons of diesel fuel into a perimeter ditch of the ComEd Braidwood facility. The fuel migrated along the ditch for approximately 2 miles and entered a wetland. The natural resource injuries that occurred, or likely occurred, as a result of the discharge of diesel fuel were:

1. 1 adult and 2 duckling wood ducks (*Aix sponsa)* and 1 red-winged blackbird (*Agelaius phoeniceus*).
2. 270 unidentified dead fish species with a maximum length of 8 to 10 inches.
3. Oiled and/or dead perimeter ditch aquatic vegetation.
4. An unknown number of dead tadpoles and snakes.
5. Perimeter ditch sediment contamination.
6. Perimeter ditch bank soil contamination.
7. Perimeter ditch surface water contamination.

Natural resources impacted, or potentially impacted, under the trusteeship of the IDNR and IEPA were, but not limited to, migratory birds, fish, amphibians, reptiles, aquatic plants, and surface water, groundwater, soil and sediment.

III. Proposed Compensatory Restoration Alternatives

After IDNR performed natural resource damage assessment activities, it was determined by the Trustees that a moist-soil management unit would be created at the nearby Mazonia-Braidwood State Fish and Wildlife Area to provide habitat for natural resources similar to those lost or injured as a result of the diesel fuel release. Such a project would provide IDNR the opportunity to restore and protect wetland habitat and the flora and fauna that utilize such habitat.

IV. Proposed Restoration Project

Wetlands in Illinois provide significant migration areas for waterfowl and other waterbirds. With proper management of water levels, mudflats become available for the establishment of moist-soil plants. A quality stand of moist-soil plants can supply many bird species with the essential cover and nutrition needed during migration periods. Moist-soil environments also provide habitat for many other flora and fauna, including many species of amphibians and reptiles.

At Mazonia-Braidwood State Fish and Wildlife Area, an existing five-acre wetland will be expanded to create an additional 3 acres of wetland habitat (Figure 1). This project will involve excavation of an agricultural field adjoining a man-made depressional wetland. Excess soil will be feathered back to encourage water to fill the wetland, sustaining one to two foot water levels throughout the year. A deepwater area will also be created to sustain water throughout the year. Finger-like protrusions will create conditions favorable for the growth of emergent vegetation. A water control structure may be added to ensure the draining of the wetland for moist-soil management. Areas within the wetland will be allowed to vegetate naturally from the seed bank. Buffer areas outside the anticipated water line will be planted in prairie.

Long term management will include, but not limited to, providing moist-soil habitat for migrating waterfowl and local wildlife.

V. Proposed Action

The IDNR, IEPA and AGO propose that the subject settlement monies be allocated to expand an existing wetland for use by spring and fall migrating waterfowl, summer resident shorebirds, and other local wildlife.

VI. Public Notice

The Trustees invite comment from any interested person or organization. Comments can be mailed or faxed to

Beth Whetsell
Office of Realty and Environmental Planning
Illinois Department of Natural Resources
One Natural Resources Way
Springfield, Illinois 62702
fax: (217) 524-4177

Comments must be received no later than May 15, 2004.

Figure 1. General area of wetland expansion at Mazonia-Braidwood State Fish and Wildlife Area (area identified by hatch-marks).