

# wetland matters



## OXBOW, INC. NEWSLETTER

P. O. BOX 43391  
CINCINNATI, OHIO 45243

Number 47, May-June 1994

### **River Boat Gambling and the Oxbow** Jerry Johnson

This column is to update the membership on the status of the Oxbow wetlands since the onset of gambling mania along the Ohio River shores of Indiana. There have been so many rumors and published concepts it has been hard for the trustees of Oxbow Inc. to keep track of them all. There are a lot of gambling enterprises with intense interest in this area. The one crucial fact is that our membership has placed a high value on the flood plain and financially invested in the objectives of saving this valuable wetlands. Had it not been for the generous support of the membership since 1986 the Oxbow would be enveloped in all sorts of destructive development plans.

Some new members will benefit from a little historical perspective. Oxbow Inc. grew from a grass roots effort reacting against a 1985 plan to develop a river barge port on the flood plain at the confluence of the Great Miami and Ohio Rivers; the port installations would have totally destroyed the ecological character of the Oxbow area. In the intervening years the membership raised and invested over \$600,000 to protect this valuable wildlife area. In November 1993, Lawrenceburg, Indiana citizens narrowly passed a ballot issue allowing river boat gambling along their shores. The closeness of the Greater Cincinnati airport, access to Interstate I-275 and the Tri-state gambling market has made Lawrenceburg one of the most valuable gambling centers in the nation.

The various gaming companies are well-financed with hundreds of millions of dollars to develop this opportunity as rapidly as possible. These companies spare no expense to satisfy all of the affected community interests the syndicates can identify. They want to get into business as soon as possible, because delays result in millions of lost daily profits. The Indiana gaming commission will select one or possibly two companies to operate floating gambling boats in the Lawrenceburg area; this decision will be made in the fall of this year.

Based on the media coverage that generally used press releases from the various syndicates it may appear to the membership that Oxbow Inc. has been privy to and in agreement with several concepts to "develop" the Oxbow flood plain for the enhancement of the gaming interests. **NOTHING COULD BE FURTHER FROM THE TRUTH.** A number of news articles reported meetings that were not conducted, and other articles preceded the meetings with no follow up on the meeting conclusions. Our mission and vision has never changed: to protect the wetlands from encroachment of commercial development. This area is a major flood plain and is to be left to function in a natural way without interference of human "improvements". The gaming syndicates have a very strong interest in the flood plain because of the limited usable Lawrenceburg shoreline, but with our investments over the past years we hold the cork to the bottle. Oxbow Inc. does not own or control all of the flood plain, but it does have strategic holdings and intends to protect these as effectively as possible.

It is not our intention to obstruct any economic development of the Lawrenceburg area, but we are faced with some wild and bizarre proposals for the flood plain, proposals made in the name of conservation and ecological education, that seriously conflict with our objectives. We want to minimize the impact on the Oxbow flood plain and have set in motion plans to involve other major conservation minded organizations to circle the wagons around the vulnerable wetlands. Plans also include environmental impact studies of changes to the entire area of the Oxbow flood plain; a report of this effort is also included elsewhere in this publication.

The trustees hope the general membership understands that we want to keep the faith that the Oxbow flood plain can and should be protected for the use by wildlife during these turbulent times.

## Birdathon '94 Last chance to pledge

Birdathon is nearly here. Participants are planning their routes and searching for "stake-outs" of unusual and hard-to-find species. From 5 pm May 6 to 5 pm May 7 they will fan out across the tri-state and identify as many species of birds as possible. With pledges ranging from a few cents to many dollars per species every bird they find brings needed funds to Oxbow, Inc.

Teams sponsored by other nonprofit organizations split the money they raise with Oxbow, but Oxbow will field three teams of its own this year. All money pledged to these teams goes directly to Oxbow.

Since Birdathon is upon us, this is your last chance to pledge your support for one of Oxbow's teams. Its easy: simply pick the team or teams you wish to support and mail in your pledge coupon. After Birdathon is over you'll receive an account of how each team did along with a memo of the amount of your pledge.

**Oxbow team #1:** "Geriatric Gents and a Junior" (Sandy Cooper, George Laycock, Jerry Meyer, and Karl Maslowski)

**Oxbow team #2:** "Fire and Brimstone Birder's Guild" (Joe Bens and Paul Wharton)

**Oxbow team #3:** "No See-ums" (David Styer, Charlie Saunders and Steve Pelikan)

## Executive Committee

Officers were elected at the February board meeting. Reelected were Morris Mercer (Vice President), Dennis Mason (Recording Secretary), Suzanne Skidmore (Corresponding Secretary), Jim Rettig (Treasurer), and David Styer (Agent). Long-time board member John Getzendanner was elected President.

A new office (Executive Director) was added to the executive committee and Norma L. Flannery was appointed to fill it.

Thanks to all those elected for their willingness to serve.

## Gifts to Oxbow, Inc.

Oxbow was awarded a grant of \$1,500.00 from the Anonymous Fund of The Greater Cincinnati Foundations.

The employees of Jacobs Engineering raised \$280.00 for Oxbow, Inc. by holding a "Dress Down Day" on which casual dress privileges could be obtained for a \$2.00 contribution. We hope they had fun dressing down and we sincerely appreciate their generosity.

## BIRDATHON '94

### Oxbow Team Pledge Form

YES! I want to pledge per species: \_\_\_\$2 \_\_\_\$1 \_\_\_75¢ \_\_\_50¢ \_\_\_25¢ \_\_\_10¢ other \_\_\_  
to support Oxbow's birdathon team(s).

NAME \_\_\_\_\_  
ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_  
CITY \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_My pledge is for Oxbow team #1, "Geriatric Gents"

\_\_My pledge is for Oxbow team #2, "Fire and Brimstone Birder's Guild"

\_\_My pledge is for Oxbow team #3, "No See-Ums"

\_\_My pledge is for the highest scoring team.

Mail to: Oxbow, Inc.  
P.O. Box 43391  
Cincinnati, OH 45243



# Calendar

## Meetings

**5 May (Thursday) at 7:30. Slide presentation at the Lawrenceburg Public Library**

Elvin Blasdel will present a program called "Pioneer Farms and Villages." You're sure to enjoy Elvin's photography. The program is free. Voluntary donations to the Dearborn Adult Center will be accepted.

**10 May (Tuesday) at 7:30. Oxbow meeting at the Cincinnati Zoo Education Building.** (Enter through the exit gate on Erkenbrecher Avenue.)

This evening's program will be presented by Steve Maslowski. He'll show the video "Birds, Birds, Birds: Why People Watch." This is a beautiful and informative film. Don't miss it.

**14 June (Tuesday) at 7:30. Oxbow meeting at the Lawrenceburg Public Library.** (From Cincinnati, turn left off U.S. 50 onto Walnut Street. Turn right on High Street. The Library is on the right side of High Street.)

John Klein, of the Hamilton County Park District, will describe HCPD's wetland restoration project at Miami Whitewater Park in this program entitled "Constructing a Wetland."

## Field Trips

**22 May (Sunday) at 9:30 Oxbow field trip.**

Meet at 50's Root Beer for this walk into the Oxbow. Phone Steve Pelikan (513)-681-2574 for more information.

**4 June (Saturday) 8:00 Oxbow field trip.**

John Klein will lead this trip to the new wetlands in Miami-Whitewater Forest. Meet in front of the visitors Center at the lake at Miami-Whitewater Forest. From there we'll go to the wetlands.

### Fieldtrips?

Thanks the Helen Steiner Rice Foundation, Oxbow has funds to help school children visit and learn about the Oxbow area. If you are a teacher and want your class to visit the Oxbow, call Kani Meyer (513)-948-8630 or Morris Mercer (513) 941-2534.

## Environmental Study

Oxbow has hired Environmental Assessment Services Inc. to undertake a study of the Oxbow area. The study will include a land use inventory, and surveys of surface and ground water resources, biological resources, archaeological resources, and air quality in the Oxbow.

The Oxbow board decided that such information was needed before it could comment on the relative merits of the different riverboat gambling developer's proposals for Dearborn County.

Three developers have agreed to share the cost of the study. Copies of the final report from EAS will be provided to these developers. Although the current rules and procedures do not allow proposals to the Indiana Gaming Commission to be modified, Oxbow Inc. will suggest that changes in proposals made in response to new environmental data (of the sort this study will produce) should be allowed.

Margaret Witt, the project manager in charge of the study, reports that EAS has prepared the base map on which overlays showing land owners, land use, vegetation types etc. will be placed and that preliminary data collection has been completed. Information has been forwarded to a variety of experts of evaluation. Preliminary field trips have been made, but most field work must be postponed until flood waters abate. Field studies of some species cannot be carried out until late May or early June.

LIKE TO HIKE?	
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HIKING OHIO: SCENIC TRAILS OF THE BUCKEYE STATE.....	\$12.95
WALKING THE DENVER-BOULDER REGION.....	\$14.95

Available at bookstores and nature centers or directly from Willow Press, 6053 S. Platte Canyon Rd., Littleton, Colorado 80123 (add \$1.50 shipping per book)

## Field Notes

Morris Mercer

Is the Oxbow area a flood plain? The entire area has flooded 5 times in the 3½ months of 1994. Is it a stopover for migrating waterfowl? If you've been there you wouldn't ask. And if you haven't been there, the migrating waterfowl sure have.

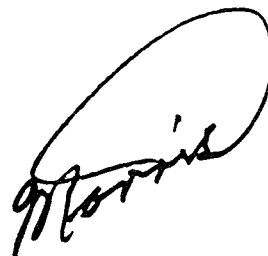
As February was coming to a close it was time for an Oxbow field trip. Because of a goof on my part we had two trips scheduled at the same time and the same place. David Styer was to lead the Oxbow field trip and I had agreed to go along with the Hamilton County Park V.I.P's. The Ohio was at 50 feet and there was no place to hike since everything was flooded.

One Friday afternoon, before the field trip on Saturday I set out to find the areas currently frequented by the ducks and geese. I found the area below Lost Bridge well used. There were a few ducks at the Oxbow Lake, but no place for people with all the water. From the underpass below 275 to the hills of Shawnee there was nothing but water and birds. Large numbers of ducks, geese, mergansers, gulls, crows, and Great-blue Herons were there. Out towards the tree line a gang of crows was making a lot of noise. Turning the scope that way I discovered that they were harassing a Bald Eagle. The eagle was trying to finish supper but had to keep dodging away from the pesky crows. Amongst the flooded willows along Cemetery Lake were Hooded Mergansers. I counted 16 males. They were especially beautiful because they were busy showing off for the girls.

On Saturday I got to 50's Root Beer and almost panicked. There must have been 50 people there, and almost as many cars. We joined the two groups into one, paid to leave some of the cars behind at 50's, and carpoled to our first stop — behind the Cemetery at the 275 underpass. Except for the way we were dressed we looked like a long funeral procession as we drove up to the underpass. The birds I'd seen the previous day were still there. The temperature was in the teens. With the wind there was a little chill in the air. But no one minded because we all got to see the eagle.

Our next stop was just below Lost Bridge. There must have been a thousand geese between the bridge and the boat ramp at Shawnee. We saw about 20 species of waterfowl in the flood plain of the Great Miami. Later we cruised past the Great-Horned Owl on her nest, and then made a second stop at the cemetery. As we watched, a Red-tailed Hawk flew low over the fields and all the gulls took off. It looked like a blizzard with hundreds of gulls in the air at one time. Dave and I were glad so many people got to see the area in the migration season. It had turned out to be a good trip.

There have been so many great trips to the Oxbow, and I've shared them with so many great people! I want to thank everyone who has shared a trip with me. One day we watched a flight of Tundra Swans coming in. A Sunday afternoon in the rain there weren't many birds on the lake, but we found birds by the hundreds down along the Miami. St. Patrick's Day we couldn't have a cookie until we found a Green-winged Teal. We found the teal and thousands of other waterfowl. One afternoon we came upon more than 100 Double-Crested Cormorants on the flooded Oxbow. Then there were the Oldsquaw just across Route 50. And the hundreds of Pectoral Sandpipers in the shallows behind the Cemetery — along with all the yellowlegs. And one Saturday we found Loons, a Bald Eagle, an Osprey, and the first Ruddy Ducks of the season. What a great place the Oxbow is — if only we can keep it as it is.



## Oxbow, Inc.

A nonprofit organization formed by conservation groups and concerned citizens of Ohio and Indiana for the purpose of preserving and protecting a wetlands area known locally as the Oxbow, Hardintown, or Horseshoe Bottoms, from industrial development and to preserve the existing agricultural floodplain at the confluence of the Great Miami and Ohio rivers for use as a staging area for the seasonal migrations of waterfowl. This is an agricultural area rich in geological, archaeological, and anthropological history.

Help us save this unique wetland. You can make your state a richer place in which to live by helping us preserve this precious resource. Membership in Oxbow, Inc. is encouraged and solicited.

Individual	\$10	Family	\$15
Contributing	\$25	Supporting	\$50
Patron	\$100	Cornerstone	\$250
Sponsor	\$500	Benefactor	\$1000
Organization/Club	\$25		

Mail to: **Oxbow, Inc.**  
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## Corporation Officers

Executive Director,  
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Vice President, Morris Mercer (513) 385-3607  
Corresponding Secretary,  
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Treasurer, Jim Rettig (513) 561-0211  
Agent, Dave Styer (513) 772-4395

## Committee Chairpersons

Conservation, Bill Bocklage (513) 922-2445  
Easement Inspection,  
Michael Klusner (513) 574-1220  
Richard Pope (513) 636-1365  
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