

Staff from Eagle Bluffs Conservation Area (CA) will begin providing periodic updates regarding current and future habitat management, public use, and other area updates. There is an abundance of interest from the public regarding the area, and the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) hopes that these updates will allow for better engagement in communication and information sharing regarding Eagle Bluffs CA. These updates will come from staff working on the CA who hold first-hand knowledge of the challenges regarding area management at Eagle Bluffs.

Eagle Bluffs CA has 2 main goals: 1.) to provide opportunities for the diverse user group that frequents the area and 2.) provide adequate habitat for the native plant and wildlife species that occur on the area. Public interest in birding, hunting, fishing, and more on the area reinforces how MDC staff manage the land. Currently, the property is being managed primarily for migratory birds as they draw a large group of birders and hunters to the area each year. There are several management practices that MDC staff utilize on the area, one of which is moist soil management. This is done by manipulating water levels to encourage the desired plants to populate the area while discouraging undesired plants from growing in that area. In addition to water level manipulation, moist soil management also includes periodic soil disturbance through practices such as disking, prescribed fire, or herbicide use.

Ideally, staff try to use moist soil management to encourage native wetland vegetation, but there are some difficulties in the ability to use this management method. Water levels in the Eagle Bluff CA pools need to be manageable by either adding or removing water in a timely manner. Area staff are currently battling a lack of available water. The area receives its water from three sources: the Missouri River, Perche Creek, and the City of Columbia. The primary source of water for area management is provided by two electric river pumps on the Missouri River. Unfortunately, both electric river pumps are currently unavailable for use.

Staff discovered issues with the first electric river pump during routine testing of the unit on June 8, 2022. These issues required that the pump be removed from service. Then, in January of 2023, an ice jam in the Missouri River caused historically low river water levels and the second electric pump failed due to a malfunction of the automatic shut-off feature. This has left Eagle Bluffs CA without its primary source of water for area management. Ongoing low water levels along Perche Creek have also contributed to the inability to pump water into the area too. This means that the sole source of water intake is coming from the treated wastewater from the City of Columbia. This is not enough water to fully support management on the area and represents only 13% of the area's total water needed.

While these issues have made managing Eagle Bluffs CA challenging, staff are working to ensure that all user groups are provided the opportunity to use the area as they desire. Staff are taking advantage of the lower water levels to treat areas that are typically inaccessible. For example, staff began removing willow trees from the upper distribution channel that was harboring an infestation of invasive Japanese hops. Although removal of these trees will change the current habitat of the upper distribution channel, this will allow for better moist soil and emergent marsh habitat that will provide wildlife viewing opportunities. Though MDC has limited ability to draw water into the pools - or flood the area completely - staff are still working to provide the best wetland habitat possible under the conditions that we are dealt. Hopefully, these planned periodic area updates will be a way for local MDC staff to share plans and get feedback from interested area users.

We are hopeful that our water management issues are going to be addressed soon. The two electric Missouri River pumps are expected to be repaired soon. One is expected to be back in service by

the end of June and the second by October. Additionally, we will continue working toward acquiring new replacement pumps that could be installed within a few years allowing Eagle Bluffs staff to manage water levels as in the past.

Finally, we want to share that Eagle Bluffs is experiencing some staff shortages. As many people already know, Brady Lichtenberg, Wildlife Biologist, took a position with another organization. Though Crew Leader, Troy Tallman, filled that role through the fall and winter, he was recently promoted to a position at Ted Shanks. The remaining technician has also been promoted and will be leaving Eagle Bluffs on May 16th. The good news is that we are working to refill those vacancies and the Crew Leader position is currently advertised. We hope to have someone in that position by July.

We appreciate the continued high interest and patience regarding the management of Eagle Bluffs CA. We urge those who have questions or concerns to please reach out. Questions about Eagle Bluffs CA can be answered by calling the local management staff at (573) 445-3882, by emailing askmdc.mo.gov, or just stopping in at the office. We will be happy to visit with you about future plans, management challenges and opportunities, and any difficulties we are trying to overcome.