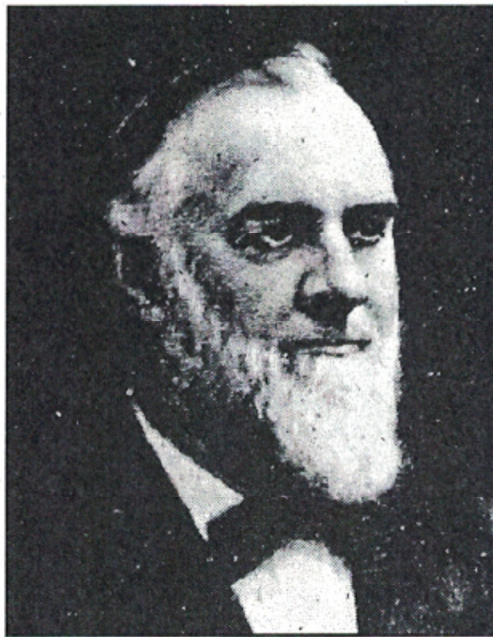


The Minnesota Game Conservation Movement



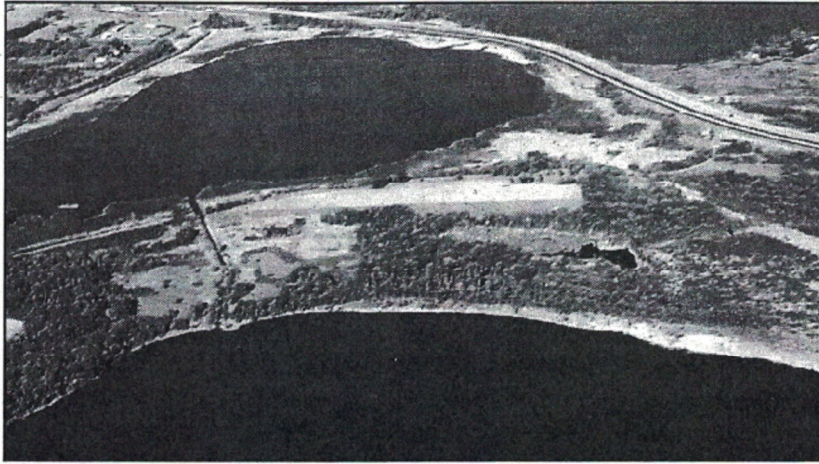
Uri Lamprey

Uri Lamprey: Father of the Minnesota Game Conservation Movement

by Marie Jones



Special thanks to Ted J. Houle, Carrol Henderson, and Mary Ann Hoyt, whose first hand accounts of these happenings made this document possible.



An aerial view of Lamprey Pass WMA including Howard and Mud lakes. Clear Lake is separated by Highway 35 in the upper right.

Traveling north from the Twin Cities on I-35 you may notice a large body of water on the left as you approach Forest Lake. Large bodies of water are not uncommon sites in the Land of 10,000 Lakes, but this one is special. The modern history of the area dates back to the early 1880's when the prominent St. Paul lawyer and sportsman, Uri Lamprey, originally

purchased the land as a private hunting ground. After Lamprey died in the early part of this century, the once famous hunting lodge was sold and the area later abandoned. The discovery of a large heron rookery in 1979 sparked renewed interest in the area. It's 400 nests made the rookery one of the largest in Minnesota and it was also the only nesting area for cormorants in the entire Twin Cities Metropolitan area. It's significance to wildlife made the area highly desirable for state ownership. Despite initially lacking acquisition funds, and an attempt by a developer to turn the area into a recreational vehicle park, the DNR was able to purchase the land in 1981.

Thanks to the dedication of local wildlife managers, the Nature Conservancy, local conservationists and money from the DNR's Chickadee Checkoff the land was designated as the Lamprey Pass Wildlife Management Area. The name-sake of the area is the "pass" between Howard and Mud Lakes where Lamprey and his friends hunted as hundreds of waterfowl flew overhead. Today, the 1,300-acre mix of wetland, woodland, grassland, and cropland is available to the public to enjoy hiking, picnicking, hunting, trapping, exploring the Hopewell Indian Mounds, snowshoeing, birdwatching, and cross-country skiing. Though surrounded by new development as the Twin Cities Metropolitan region expands northward, Lamprey Pass WMA remains an accessible wilderness, similar in appearance and ecological significance as when numerous Indians tribes and later Uri Lamprey made use it more than 100 years later.

Geologic History

During the period known as the Wisconsin Glaciation, 75,000 years ago, Lamprey Pass WMA was covered by an advancing glacier. During this time, ice advanced and retreated in a complex pattern, depositing boulders, rocks, sand and other glacial till in distinct layers. Glacial till seen today, deposited as deep as 200 feet, is evidence of the glacier's path. When the glacier traveled over Minnesota, it covered nearly the whole state. The powerful advancing ice scraped the landscape, destroyed vegetation and crushed boulders the size of houses. When the climate warmed and the glacier retreated, it's meltwater formed rivers underneath the ice which eroded the land. This destruction of the land by the ice and meltwater caused the depressions, lakes and wetlands that characterize much of Minnesota.

During the final stages of the Wisconsin Glaciation, the Grantsburg Sublobe, a lobe of ice located near what is today South Dakota, began moving northeast. As it crossed the Mississippi River over a broad area from Minneapolis to St. Cloud, the ice caused the river to reroute itself, first flowing northeast near Grantsburg, then back southeast through the St. Croix Valley and eventually joining the original Mississippi River course. As the ice melted and redirected the river's flow it deposited very fine, uniform sand over a roughly 3,000-square-mile area known today as the Anoka Sandplain. The soil texture in this sand outwash plain is fine due to the continuous movement of the glacier depositing till and aeolian silt. Mud and Howard Lakes are the result of an ice block that melted and formed a basin.

Native American Heritage

The human history of Lamprey Pass can be traced back to when the Hopewell Indians first ventured north for trade. This ancient mound building tribe was concentrated in the Ohio and Illinois River valleys beginning around 300 B.C. The Hopewell Indians were known to have established an extensive trading region with tribes over the entire North American continent and archaeologists believe the remains found on Lamprey Pass are from a journey through the area.

The Hopewell left behind six mounds on the eastern side of Howard Lake. These six mounds, three large and three small, are of particular interest for two reasons. The arrangement of the mounds is unusual because larger mounds are typically surrounded by smaller ones and in this case the smaller three are located in a separate grouping from the larger three. Secondly, two habitation sites can be observed. The three larger mounds were discovered in 1889. The largest mound in the group, Mound I, measures 125' x 90' x 19' high and is one of the largest in the state. Mound II is 85' x 48' x 5.5' high, and Mound III is circular measuring 70' in diameter and 6' high.

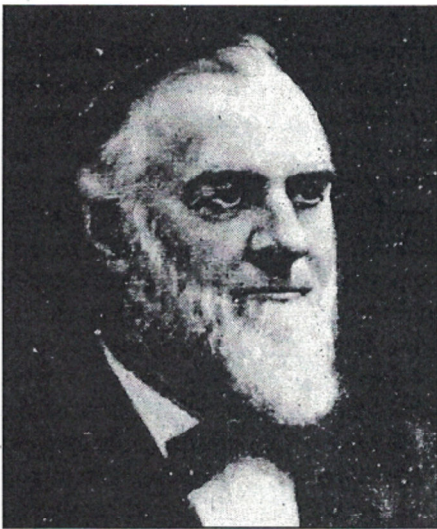
Mound III was excavated by University of Minnesota archaeologists in June and July of 1950 and many interesting artifacts were found. The mound was filled with pottery, cracked hearth stones, animal bones and various other artifacts. It was in this mound that the burial site was found. The first skeleton found was from an adult of unknown gender. The partial skeleton included two femur bones found the correct anatomical distance from the head. No complete skeletons were found and preservation of the remains were very poor. Most of the burials were determined to be bundle burials, which are random disjointed bones. The one exception was the charred bones of a skeleton. This suggested a cremation which had taken place elsewhere. Archaeologists speculated that the bones were then transported and laid with the others. In total, 20 burials were discovered all consisting of either young or old adults.

The smaller three mounds were not discovered until October of 1977. They are located north of the larger ones and all measure about 130' x 20' x 1' to 3' high. Surrounding these smaller mounds is a large habitation site of the Hopewell. When University of Minnesota archaeologists visited the site in the fall of 1977, they discovered thin but consistent layers of debris including burnt bones, flaked stone tools, and pottery. Test pit excavations at the habitation site uncovered material buried 45-90 cm deep. With the great concentration of artifacts found, more is thought to be buried deeper. The second habitation site is located east of the larger mounds. When this site was inspected superficially and excavated to a depth of 100 cm, archaeologists found various rock flakes, pottery and burnt bones. Townspeople have consistently reported throughout the years findings of numerous arrow-

heads on the Lamprey Pass WMA and surrounding community. During the construction of local roads, throughout the pass, between Howard and Mud Lakes and near Columbus Lake are where the arrowheads are most abundant. These findings reinforce the theory of a hunting and habitation site in the area.

The mounds are now grass and tree covered, disguising themselves as small hills. They are easier to see during the fall when tree leaves have dropped to the ground. Sadly, motorcyclists and four-wheelers have damaged the outsides of the larger mounds with tire tracks but not the contents inside.

Uri Lamprey: sportsman and conservationist



Uri Lamprey

During the more than 2,000 years after the Hopewells left their remnants, the Lamprey Pass area was most likely used by humans as a hunting site by Indian tribes, and later by European pioneers. But it was not until the late 1880's that anyone paid particular attention to the wilderness there. Uri Lamprey, born in Deerfield, New Hampshire on April 7, 1842, was the man that did. The son of a poor farmer and preacher of a Congregational church, the young and ambitious Lamprey showed his determination and ability to work hard by putting himself through school when his family was unable to do so. Very proud of this fact and eager to continue he followed the trend of the times and moved west, finally stopping in St. Paul, Minnesota in the early 1860's. Once there he joined his brother's law office where he worked until he was admitted into the Ramsey County Bar on November 25, 1865. Earlier that same year he

married Jeanette, daughter of Captain Louis Robert, a St. Paul pioneer.

After several years of study Uri Lamprey and his brother formed a partnership and their firm became known as Lamprey Law Firm. The lawfirm was considered one of the best in the state and Uri established a reputation as a prominent lawyer specializing in real estate and equity cases. Following his brother's death he formed two other law firms with partners beginning in 1874. Lamprey finally retired in 1883, at the age of 41, to focus his attention on his numerous real estate holdings he had acquired over the years. These included Lamprey Lake, otherwise known as Holman Field in downtown St. Paul, and the Lamprey Hunt Club he purchased in 1881 near Howard and Mud Lakes.

Throughout his career as a lawyer he advocated game and fish conservation. Being a naturalist and hunter as well as a lawyer, he was appointed by Governor VanSant to the Game and Fish Commission in 1901, a forerunner to the Department of Natural Resources. Lamprey acted as president until his death in 1906. During his tenure, Lamprey passed many laws concerning game law restrictions and limitations, acquired state park land, prohibited the selling of game caught while hunting and established a hunting season.

The Game and Fish Commission was created in 1891 and was composed of five members that served four-year terms. The Commission was responsible for the protection, propa-



A spring fed pond at the Lamprey Hunt Club utilized as a federal banding station for passing waterfowl. This site was one of few in the nation at the time. Birds banded here were found as far away as Cuba and other parts of South America. Pictured left to right are Walter Houle caretaker from 1917 to 1945, and his son Ted J. Houle.

gation, and breeding of the game and fish species that Minnesota deemed important by gathering statistics, writing reports, enforcing laws enacted for protection of the game and fish, and protecting nongame birds and animals. The presidency of the Game and Fish Commission and the Minnesota Game and Fish Protective Association were the only public offices Lamprey held, despite numerous offers.

Lamprey used his political influence

to lobby for strict game laws. He collaborated with his closest friends, including P.E. Hanson, Minnesota Secretary of State, H.G. Smith, a member of the Game and Fish Commission, and W.B. Douglas, a former justice on the Minnesota Supreme Court to invite state legislators to the Lamprey Hunt Club for duck hunting. During their visits, Lamprey would speak of his disgust of hunters who shot and trapped well over what they needed. He used his influence to try to preserve the nature and wildlife around him. The area was excellent for hunting as well as portraying and emphasizing the importance of conservation.

The land established as the hunt club was beautiful. Tucked between Howard and Mud lakes, it offered an escape from the hectic business world. As you entered the hunt club grounds the first building on your right was the barn. This immense building was two and three stories tall, 180 feet long and between 40 and 60 feet wide. The barn was used as a stage coach stop where travelers would pause and switch horses, as well as housing a large amount of livestock. Next, on your right, you would see the caretaker's house and then finally the hunt club itself. Across from the barn on the left was the blacksmith's shop. There they made horseshoes, bits, repaired necessary farm items and serviced the stage coaches.

The hunt club was rather plain on the outside but decorated lavishly on the inside with numerous mounts and antlers from past hunts. The main lobby was over half the length of the first floor with an enormous fireplace large enough to burn four foot logs. This room was used for entertaining, meeting, and gathering before the hunt. The house had ten bedrooms to house members and guests. On top of the house was a weather vane that extended down through the roof and into the main lobby. This allowed the hunters to determine wind direction from the comfort of the lodge. From a map of the area mounted on the ceiling, guests could choose the best shooting pits for the day based on wind direction. But to be fair, dice were rolled for assignment of the pits. Lamprey and his friends would routinely climb into the tower which housed the weather vane and surveyed the area. There they would view the hundreds of ducks and geese that flew across the area.

Adjacent and across from the club house were cultivated fields where the caretaker



Lamprey Hunt Club barn during the 1930's.



Lamprey Hunt Club main house during the 1940's



The Caretaker's house on lamprey Hunt Club in 1978 after vandalism.

gathering was also held before the start of each hunting season. During this time the families of the members were allowed to visit. At no other point were the families, especially the females, allowed to visit.

Nothing but the best was found at the Hunt Club. Beginning with guests arriving in their chauffeur-driven Packards and Pierce Arrows and ending with a private burial ground that was maintained for deceased hunting dogs. This grave yard contained as many as a dozen granite headstones for these loyal companions. One larger head stone read "Each man in his lifetime is entitled to one good dog and one good woman." Needless to say, some wives objected to the dog being mentioned first.

The hunt club was definitely for Minnesota's elite, which was obvious from the design of the house to the convenience of conducting business from the shooting pits. In the pits hunting was interrupted occasionally to use the special telephone lines that ran directly into each one. Important business deals around the world were made from these pits, as well as calls to the main house for sandwiches and drinks.

Ducks shot were retrieved by either dogs or young boys. Lamprey was a strict sportsman, never killing more than 2 or 3 ducks at a time, and advocated his conservationist values to all that hunted his land. To keep the sporting chance alive only double barreled shot guns were allowed, no automatic or pump guns. Hunters were only allowed to shoot from the designated pits between Mud Lake and Howard Lake. No shooting over water was allowed so ducks would not be scared away from the area. Another of Lamprey's rules was once a decoy was set for the season it was not moved until the season was over. This was to ensure the ducks would continue to fly the same path between the two lakes. All rules imposed on members and their guests were for the purpose of conservation and keeping the sport in hunting.

Even though Lamprey lived a high lifestyle he was not considered a snob. He was a generous man whom always helped those out in need. Lamprey welcomed teaching young children about hunting, often inviting them to the club for a day. During their visit he would teach them how to use a gun properly, hunt with respect, and have fun. He also paid

grew corn and grain. The Lamprey Hunt Club was an example of hunting and farming working together in harmony. Often hunters and farmers are in conflict over land, but here they cooperated. The caretaker would grow crops for his own monetary income but when hunting season began he would then devote his time to Lamprey and the men that visited.

Lamprey and the other members only used the land during hunting season. Before hunting season began the caretaker would mow the paths to the hunting grounds, clean the shooting pits and hire a cook and butler. The guests and members were waited on with much attention. A



One of two remaining dog headstones.



Special guests at the Lamprey Hunt Club were not uncommon; pictured here in 1931 standing left to right are members Roger Shepard, Ted Brown, Oliver Crosby, B.C. Thompson, Oliver Crosby Jr. and seated left to right are John Upham, guest Maurice Bellonte, Horace Thompson, unknown security guard, guest Dieudonne Costes, and an unknown French interpreter. Bellonte and Costes were the returning flight after Lindberg had flown across the Atlantic Ocean the previous year.

close attention to the natural world around him, taking long walks alone through the hunting grounds to learn about different birds, their nesting habits and calls.

Uri Lamprey was a man well respected by all that knew him. His death in 1906 at the age of 64 to Bright's disease was mourned by many. He is known as the Father of Minnesota Game Laws, and Lamprey Pass is considered the birthplace of wildlife conservation in Minnesota.

The Discovery

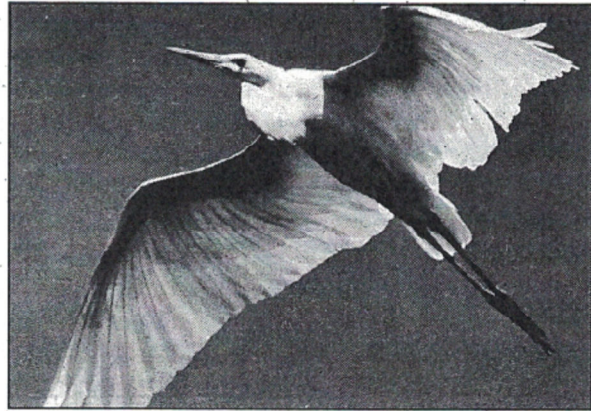
After Lamprey's death there was a slow decrease in the quantity of waterfowl and interest in the hunt club until the last caretaker finally left around 1975. In 1979, the owners, Alfred France and Edward C. Brown, put the property up for sale. France and Brown were sons of Cyrus Brown, one of the surviving original gun club members. They had inherited the property and had no interest in using it. At that time the primary visitors to the unattended land were teenagers, motorcyclists, four-wheel enthusiasts, and vandals. Vandalism and arson destroyed what was once the esteemed hunt club lodge. By the summer of 1980, all that remained of the main house was the brick chimney.

During the time the Lamprey Hunt Club was falling into ruin, a new conservation program was being built. The Nongame Wildlife Program had been recently established in 1977 and many tasks had to be completed for the first time. Carrol Henderson, nongame supervisor for the section of wildlife, was compiling a list of heron rookeries around the state to create an inventory of the birds. Henderson had begun organizing a count from all the

known rookeries and had alerted other DNR wildlife managers to be on the lookout for new ones. On July 11, 1979, Roger Johnson, regional wildlife manager, Lloyd Knudson, area wildlife manager, and Tom Isley, assistant chief of wildlife, were flying in the Forest Lake area. During the flight they passed over the northeast end of Howard Lake and saw a large heron rookery. Knowing that Henderson was currently inventorying the birds, they informed him of their find. At the time, no one realized the uniqueness of the colony nor the action that was soon to follow.

The rookery was a surprise to Henderson and he soon traveled to the property to investigate. A ground check on July 23, 1979 confirmed what was seen from the air. One of the largest great blue heron rookeries in the state of Minnesota was hidden there. Three days later, on July 26, Henderson returned to the colony with Knudson, Julie Reitter and Mark Murray, two Young Adult Conservation Corp interns, to obtain an accurate count. They found the colony to contain 396 nests in 119 trees. It consisted of approximately 50 percent great blue heron nests, 40 percent great egret nests, and 10 percent black-crowned night heron nests. Numerous double-crested cormorants were seen in the area and their nesting sites were later confirmed. The four also noted that the area was full of additional wildlife species. The presence of a shallow wetland area with an abundance of wild rice made the area very appealing to a wide range of waterfowl. Various other wildlife like deer, muskrat, and fox were plentiful, and later it was estimated to be home to 69 species of birds.

It was the heron colony that had the most biological significance. There are 123 heron colonies in Minnesota, but only one other had such a unique combination of birds and only four others were as large as the rookery count was in 1979. The colony, which covered roughly 40-acres of wooded upland area, was the only home of the double-crested cormorant in the Twin Cities Metropolitan region and one of only 13 in the state. Moreover, the colony was one of only two egret nesting sites in the Twin Cities and one of only 23 statewide. For the budding Nongame Wildlife Program, it was a remarkable find.



A great blue heron.

The Acquisition

The DNR wanted to purchase the land and develop it as a wildlife management area. Agency officials first met with Brown on January 16, 1980 to discuss purchasing the land. Meanwhile, a developer was also inquiring about the land for the purpose of building a recreational vehicle (RV) park. The developer acquired an option from France and Brown that gave him the first opportunity to purchase the property pending approval from the different boards and committees. That fall, the developer approached the Columbus Township Planning Commission on August 23, 1980 to explain his idea and seek a variance and permit to build the park. For the DNR this was not welcomed news. Henderson and others feared that the park would disturb the herons and diminish the rookery. The DNR began negotiations and on September 2, 1980 offered to give France and Brown the Bayport Wild-

life Management Area near Stillwater, appraised at \$541,000, in exchange for Howard Lake and the area containing the rookery, appraised at \$522,000. Even though they would have realized a net gain, France and Brown were more interested in receiving cash for their property. The old hunt club land was becoming a tax burden and acquiring more land would have also been counter productive. They did not completely reject the idea however, and decided to keep lines of communication open in case negotiations with the developer fell through.

On September 29, 1980 the developer came before the Columbus Township Board to discuss his plan. The proposed project included an 800 unit RV park with a deluxe club house containing a country club style atmosphere open to the general public. It would include tennis courts, a 9-hole golf course, a heated swimming pool and recreational area on 640 acres of the land.

Henderson, who was present at the meeting, pointed out that part of the proposed development would be dangerously close to the rookery and would likely result in the birds abandoning the site. Conversely, he also pointed out that the stench of dead fish and sound of herons would make it very unpleasant to camp near active heron nests. He then cited a similar case on Lake Coronus in Hennepin County in 1975. A developer attempted to integrate a bible camp with a heron colony and the colony was eventually abandoned.

The general feeling from the township was to preserve the land for the sake of the bird colony. Henderson assured the township that the DNR would negotiate with France and Brown, should Olson step away. The Township turned the developer's request down for the rezoning variance and special use permit. The reason for the refusal was simple, the Township wanted to save the bird colony. Also, the 800 unit RV park would violate the Township's five-acre minimum lot size for development.

Meanwhile, the DNR was having trouble coming up with the finances for purchasing. Fundraising tactics were available for game species, but funding for nongame species was difficult to find. In the past, federal money did not become available to help preserve a nongame species until the species itself had declined to such an extent that it was either threatened or endangered. Then, unexpectedly, the idea to create a Nongame Wildlife Checkoff for the state income tax forms was proposed.

First established in Colorado in 1977, the donation program came to Minnesota in 1980. Indicated by a loon on the state income tax forms, people had the option to donate \$1 or more to the Nongame Wildlife Program. The first year the checkoff was in effect it raised \$647,000 and gave Henderson a way to finance the acquisition of the land. Without this income, the Lamprey Pass acquisition could not have occurred.

On October 17, 1980 the developer revisited the Columbus Township Planning Commission and his requests were approved. The Township Board was the final authority though, and denied his requests, stating their main concern was the preservation of the rookery. They also had additional concerns like clientele staying longer than the summer, trespass on neighboring land, what police authority would serve them, who was responsible during the off season and increased sewage and electrical needs.

The developer, realizing the rookery was the selling point, met with Henderson and Charles Burrows, director of the division of fish and wildlife, on November 7, 1980. The DNR agreed to purchase 100-acres of land, including the rookery, to isolate it from development and provide adequate feeding area and room for growth.

The developer presented an amendment to his original proposal on November 12, 1980 at a Township Board public meeting. Included in his new proposal was a reduction in the number of units to 350 to accommodate the 5-acre requirement, a 40-acre buffer zone between the neighboring houses to lessen the chance of trespass, a 40-acre donation to the

Columbus Township for their private use, along with the DNR's purchase of land the rookery was on. A final decision was not made at that time and another meeting was scheduled for December 1, 1980.

Many people attended that next meeting in December. Once again, the developer tried to answer questions and calm the fears of the town about the project. He opened his statement with a bible quote "Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free." He was under the impression that the Columbus Township Board continued to reject his requests because they were confused about what he planned to do and how he was to accomplish it. While the Township was deciding the fate of the land, the DNR stood aside and waited. They had no control over the Township's decision. All parties knew the value of the rookery and land in question, but environmental ethics are not easily decided. The DNR was impressed by the way the Township pulled together to save the rookery. Led by two locals, Mary Ann Hoyt and Don Steinke, they showed that grassroots support can make a difference and that the people of Columbus cared what became of their town.

The Township questioned the developer thoroughly. The developer informed the townspeople that France and Brown were not interested in a land trade, so their only hope for preservation was to allow him to purchase it. He argued that his residents would contribute revenue and assured the Township that because the majority, 85%, of residents would be over age 65, vandalism and trespass would not be an issue. The RV park would have it's own security, maintain it's own roads, connect it's own sewer lines, and provide a year round resident caretaker. No matter how good the arrangement seemed, no one could guarantee the longevity of the rookery. After a long, tense meeting that went deep into the night, it was adjourned with no decision.

On December 4, 1980 two petitions were presented to the Planning Commission by the town. One petition in support of the RV park, with 171 signatures, was in favor of the greater possible tax yield, seasonal operation, increased job possibilities and retail sales for the community, it was too good to pass. The other petition was against the development, with 193 signatures, and simply stated that the development should not occur because of the imminent danger to the birds and it did not fulfill the 5-acre requirement.

Once again the developer returned to the Planning Commission on December 12, 1980 and the motion carried for the rezoning variance and special use permit, but a return to the Township Board defeated the request. The developer, exhausting money and resources, realized he was not going to make any progress. When his option to purchase expired, he did not reapply and stepped away from the Lamprey land. This was a great relief to the citizens of Columbus as well as the DNR. With the money the Nongame Wildlife Checkoff had brought in, they could now pursue the option of buying the land.

After a Battle Fought Hard and Long...

On April 4, 1981 Knudson appeared before the Township Board and requested approval for the DNR to acquire the land. The Nature Conservancy (TNC), a private organization that purchases land with natural features worth preserving, agreed to obtain the option from France and Brown, purchase the land, and resell it back to the DNR. This was to ensure no other developers would try to purchase the land while the DNR was obtaining the remainder of the funds needed. Knudson informed the Board that the DNR would use the land as a Wildlife Management Area and create a bird sanctuary around the rookery during nesting season to lessen disturbance.

The only obstacle left was for the DNR to gain county board approval to purchase the land. This was an unusual circumstance since the land resided in two different counties, with 241 acres in Washington County and 1,027 in Anoka County. This meant they had to gain two separate approvals with the worst case scenario being an approval from one county board but not the other. With the strong backing from Columbus Township, the DNR felt confident they would succeed. On April 23, 1981 they gained the approval from the Washington County Board and shortly thereafter, on May 26, from Anoka County.

Finally everything was coming together. On August 20, 1981 the Brown Family signed the deed for the Lamprey area over to TNC and on September 11 the France Family did the same. TNC closed on the property on September 11, 1981 for \$380,000.00. With appraisals ranging from \$560,000 to \$660,000, Brown and France generously agreed to sell the area for under market value in order to ensure the preservation of the rookery, not to mention the tax benefits they would receive when donating gifts to a non-profit organization such as TNC.

Columbus Township purchased a 22-acre parcel on October 30, 1981 for \$22,000 and converted it into Columbus Township Park. Today the park has a baseball field and play ground equipment which are enjoyed daily by the community. Another small parcel of land was sold to create a public fishing access for Clear Lake. The revenue from these two sales was subtracted from the total the DNR was to pay.

On November 18, 1981, roughly 100 years after Uri Lamprey acquired the land himself, the DNR purchased the Lamprey farm. With \$200,000 from the Nongame Wildlife Fund and \$196,000 from the Game and Fish license surcharge fund, TNC was paid in full and the acquisition was completed approximately two years after the rookery was sighted.

The acquisition of Lamprey Pass WMA marked the first time money was used from the Nongame Wildlife Tax Check-off revenue. And because the WMA was open for limited hunting, it demonstrated how hunting dollars and nongame revenue could be combined to purchase land for both hunted and protected species. Moreover, the acquisition created a WMA within the Twin Cities Metropolitan region. And finally, it secured the permanent protection of an environmentally important mix of forest, wetland, upland and lakes that held one of the largest heron rookeries in Minnesota.

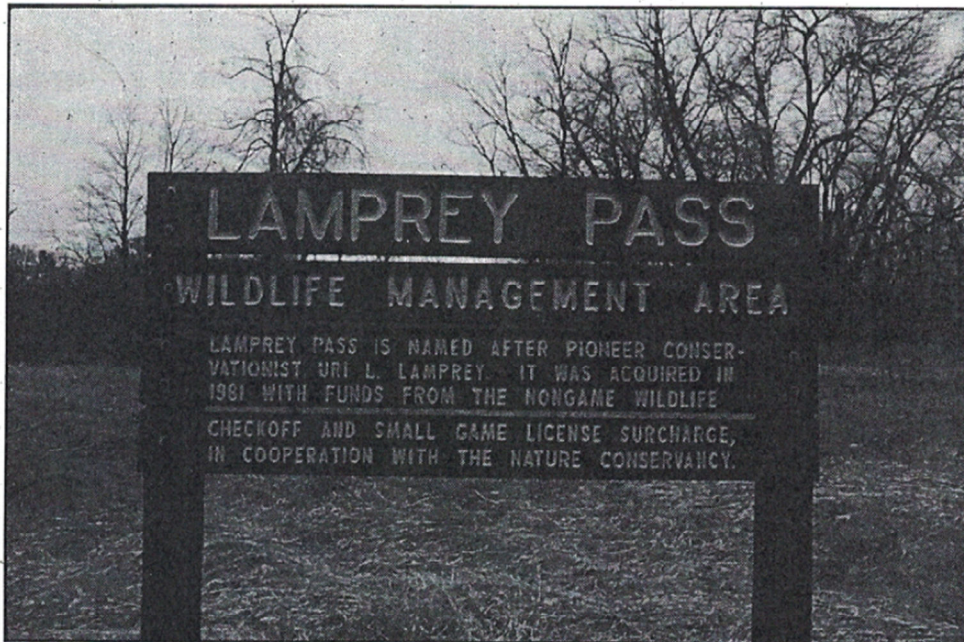
Lamprey Pass Wildlife Management Area was dedicated as the Edward C. Brown memorial on September 7, 1982. For the first couple of years the bird colony was managed as a sanctuary during the breeding season, from mid-March to mid-April, with limited hunting allowed. The bird population at the colony remained relatively stable until 1987. That year, no black-crowned night herons or double-crested cormorants was seen during the annual inventory. Two years later, during the 1989 inventory, a count of the egrets found only one nest in the entire colony. By July of 1990, it was confirmed that both great egrets and black-crowned night herons had nearly abandoned the rookery, finding a total of only 8 egrets in contrast to 90 nests in 1982. Cormorants were also decreasing in numbers and in 1993 there was a significant reduction of nests. Only 86 great blue heron nests, 1 or 2 great egrets and 1 or 2 pair of double crested cormorants were found. Finally in 1996, one great blue heron was spotted, but sadly no confirmed nesting for any bird species in the entire 40 acre rookery. The despondent conclusion of abandonment was finally true.

No one knows for sure why the rookery was abandoned. It is speculated that the bird population of the Howard Lake rookery has migrated five miles south to Peltier Lake. As the Howard Lake count dropped the Peltier Lake count steadily increased. In 1989, 12 great blue heron nests counted at Peltier Lake with no other species spotted in the vicinity. Then, in 1993, 200 active great egret nests were observed for the first time, and in 1996, 12 active nests of black-crowned night herons were observed.

Biologists suspect that the increasing number of carp and black bullheads in Howard and Mud Lakes are primarily to blame. These rough fish are bottom feeders that they use their snouts to dig into the soil and uproot growing vegetation. This causes the water to become muddy and the sunlight cannot penetrate, which consequently causes the remaining vegetation to die. Minnows and other small fish living among the plants disappear. The fish-eating herons, egrets and cormorants are then forced to search elsewhere for food.

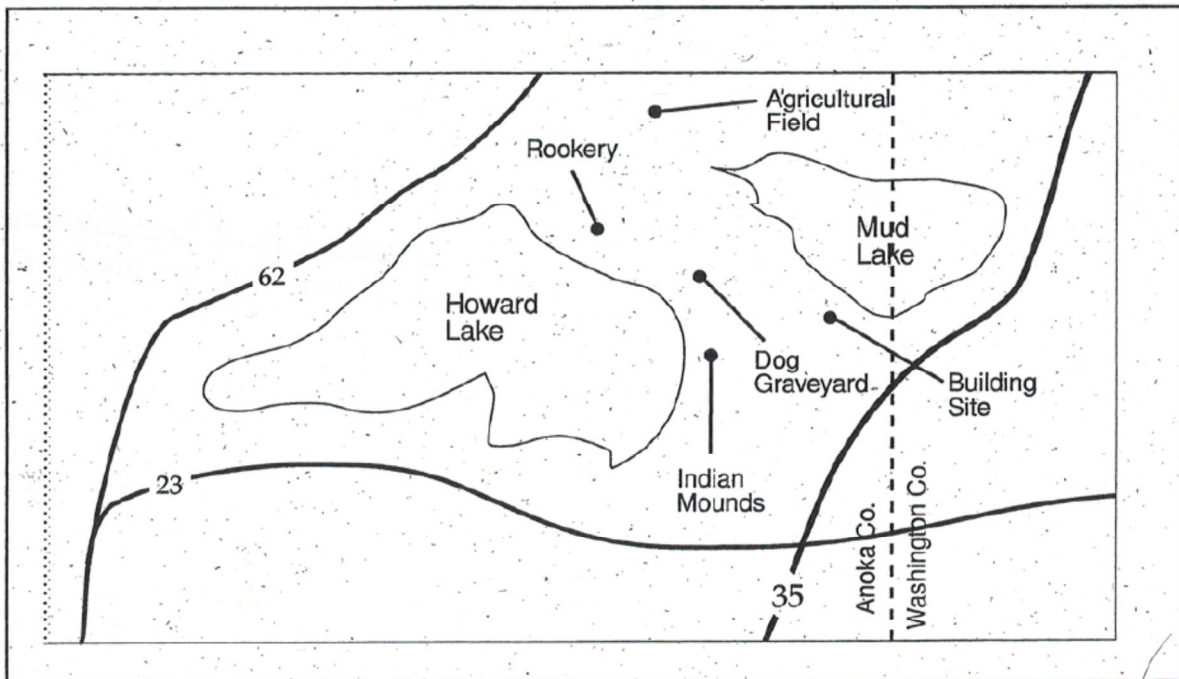
The damage done by these rough fish also impacts water quality in the entire Watershed. Mud and Howard lakes are the second and third lakes respectively in the Rice Creek Watershed District. The health of these lakes is of special concern that these lakes stay healthy because they impact the water quality and clarity further downstream, affecting the entire watershed.

The DNR is now attempting to revive the lost colony. Management efforts to eliminate rough fish from the lakes and install fish barriers to minimize fish re-entry will begin the road to recovery. Once the water has cleared, vegetation will re-establish and in time biologists hope the lakes will again foster a healthy and diverse ecological community. With any luck, the lakes will once again become attractive to the colonial nesting birds and countless other wildlife species that flourished more than a century ago when Uri Lamprey first set eyes on the area.



A sign welcoming visitors to the area.

Lamprey Pass Wildlife Management Area



Related Article

“Uri Lamprey (1842-1906)” (MLHP, 2019)

Posted MLHP: July 14, 2019.