

After-Action Report:

National Wildlife Refuge Week 2012 *On the Air*



For the seventh year, Lake Effect Amateur Radio Club operated an amateur radio station at the Seney National Wildlife Refuge as part of a nation-wide observance of National Wildlife Refuge Week On the Air. We joined with seven other Refuge-based radio operations nationwide to talk with other amateur radio operators around the world about the Refuge system and the values it supports and the recreational and educational opportunities it provides.

This type of activity falls under the general title of “special event”. An amateur radio special event is a thinly disguised emergency communications drill. We self-deploy to a field location using portable equipment and temporary antennas and test ourselves on how well we deploy, set up and resolve practical on-the-ground issues of providing communications service separated from standard infrastructure. The “disguise” element is the adoption of a theme or cause or historical event that will make the contacts more interesting to the ham radio community in general. Examples of other special events include such themes as Museum Ships Weekend, annual Raptor Migrations, the Pony Express, the 50th anniversary of the Mackinac Bridge and hundreds of other titles. It’s a fun element of the hobby that is enjoyed by thousands of ham operators and short-wave radio listeners around the world.

This national amateur radio special event is engineered to coincide with the official National Wildlife Refuge Week . This gives operators flexibility in terms of recruiting helpers, getting time off of work, coordinating with public events at the Refuges and so on. For this cycle, the Luce Amateur Radio Association (LARS), located at Newberry, Michigan, co-operated the event.

Operations Essentials: LARS volunteers operated 5 hours on Sunday, October 14th and Lake Effect volunteers were on-air 12 hours Friday and Saturday, October 19th and 20th. We placed the operating shelter at the entrance to the walk leading to the Visitor Center as in 2011 and it continues to be a very good location. This gives Visitor Center foot traffic an opportunity to hear and see what we are doing and this generates some opportunities to chat with visitors about amateur radio. We took a beating from the weather this year during both operating sessions and had to evacuate or partially collapse the shelter to deal with rain and high winds.

Visitor Services Manager Sara Giles helped us this cycle deal with on-site issues, including recovery after the weather issues. The sun was out when this picture was taken, but note the wet pavement and rumpled fabric of the shelter. The sign, front, survived the storm in good shape. As usual, rig, at back, is run off battery, just left of the rig. Visitor Services Specialist Jennifer McDonough, who has helped us with permits and on-site issues since the inception of the event, was not on-site for the event, but her assistance and support is well known and appreciated. Thanks, Jen!!

After-Action Report:

National Wildlife Refuge Week 2012 *On the Air*



Technical: We operated some sideband (voice) for this event but our primary operating mode was PSK31, and this to good effect. We used a Kenwood TS-570DG transceiver and a Cobra Ultra-Lite Jr. linearly-loaded all-band wire antenna configured as an inverted-vee. The radio was powered by a marine deep-cycle battery, which was recharged overnight using a small generator. The computer (for digital operations) was powered by a battery jump-start booster box and, later, by an extension run from the van. We have found this basic configuration to be manageable (can be set up, configured and tested by a single person in less than an hour), reliable and very effective running at reduced power – 70 watts voice and 30 watts digital. On the digital side, we used DM-780 and HRD Logbook, the digital software, respectively, and the logger element of the Ham Radio Deluxe suite on an older Dell B-120 laptop computer.

One challenge of operating digital mode is being able to see the computer screen in open sunshine. We have tried to shield the screen by using opaque tent walls, creating a cardboard “hood” and other means. These both had their advantages, but screened us from visitor viewing. We took an extreme tack this year and ran successfully with a hooded sweatshirt (!) draped to enclose both the operator’s head and screen of the laptop computer. I’m sure this looked pretty strange, but it was effective in terms of being able to operate in full sun.

We took advantage of the welcome recent upswing of Solar Cycle 24 to make contacts on the higher standard ham bands, including 10, 12 and 15 meters.

Operating digital avoided voice-band competition for bandwidth with state QSO-party traffic.

Results: Very productive overall! 144 QSOs overall, 34 states, 12 DX entities. This is a new high-water mark for contacts for this event!

<i>States</i>		<i>Countries</i>
AL	ME	Belarus
CO	MI	Canada
CT	MN	Croatia
DE	MO	Czech Republic
FL	MS	Finland
GA	MT	Germany
IA	NC	Hungary
ID	NH	Italy
IL	NJ	Poland
KS	NM	Sardinia
KY	NY	Slovenia
MA	OH	Spain
MD	OK	USA
	PA	
	TX	

After-Action Report:

National Wildlife Refuge Week 2012 *On the Air*

As usual, we were limited in our ability to make contacts with western states – we had to shut down operations before the bands opened in that direction. Still, it is clear that an emergency deployment in the Seney area would be an effective Midwest regional communications partner.

We have had a 30% request rate for QSL (contact confirmation) cards. This is about standard for special events. The QSL card we used is shown below, custom designed from pictures taken at the refuge over the summer. Note that it includes a section for technical contact information as well as some key fact items about the Seney refuge proper.

For the first time, contacts were loaded to both Logbook of the World and EQSL databases.

Publicity Efforts: We promoted the event and awareness of the event through several means:

Obtained permission to use the special event call sign N8W. This is called a “1 by 1” call – one prefix letter and one suffix letter, and they are reserved for special situations and have an exceptional application and issuance process. They are noticed by all amateurs and always raise some interest.

Put announcements in radio club newsletters and made announcements during local and regional amateur radio net sessions (HARA weekly net near Marquette, UP Net (regional interest) and others)

Published announcement in QST, the American amateur radio journal published by the American Radio Relay League.

Added event announcements to eHam.com and QRZ.com special event calendars on-line.

Published detailed information about the event and operating schedule at the Lake Effect club website (<http://www.lakeeffectarc.info/Event-NWRWeek/index.htm>).

Published summary information via a special page at QRZ.com. QRZ is used by the entire amateur radio community as a reference source. Page is copied here for documentation; note in particular the number of lookups: 506:

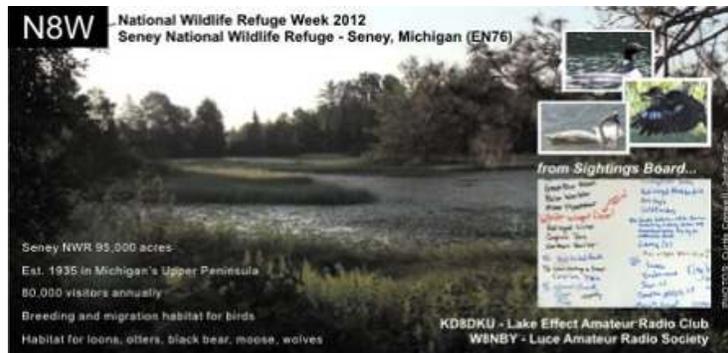
After-Action Report: National Wildlife Refuge Week 2012 *On the Air*

Lookups: 506

QSL: KD8DKU

- Biography
- Detail
- Notes

National Wildlife Refuge Week 2012 from Seney NWR in the fabulous UP of Michigan!



Lake Effect ARC, near Marquette, Michigan, is a proud participant in this fine radio event.

See the Band/Ops plan. NOTE that plans are plans and subject to change. PLEASE check back as the event draws near. **Note especially:** We are colliding in time (and space!) with the Pa QSO party this year, and will be spending time on 17m and 20m PSK as we have to. CALL THE OPERATOR to sked a QSO if you can't find us, or check DX-Spots.

<http://lakeeffectarc.info/Event-NWRWeek/index.htm>

We will be operating from the National Wildlife Refuge at Seney, Michigan.

See the National NWR Week site here: www.NWRWeek-radio.info

After-Action Report:

National Wildlife Refuge Week 2012 *On the Air*

This is an example of the “multiplier effect” of amateur radio. We tallied 144 contacts, but we had 506 web lookups. Roughly, then, for every contact we made, there were at least 3 other “listeners” out there we did not directly contact, and they were motivated enough by the contact they heard to look us up. There were other listeners who heard the contacts but who were not motivated enough to look us up. We can’t know that number with certainty, but we can suppose at least two more. That is, for every contact we made, we shared information about Seney and the national Refuge system with approximately 6 people, and probably more. This is pretty effective marketing.

On site at the Refuge, we handed out “eyeball QSO” cards to visitors who stopped in at our shelter. The eyeball card was the contact confirmation card pictured just above with a sticker applied thanking them for visiting our operation in place of the technical contact information shown in the sample.

We have found it useful to brief Visitor Center volunteers (at the desk, for instance) on what we are doing. This helps them, in turn, brief visitors who ask them about the activities in the parking lot.

We had good on-site event signage including the Lake Effect club banner spanning the back wall of the shelter (made a good sun blocker for operations early in the day) and the usual 3 by 5 foot sign we have used in the past.

Finally, we were listed in the national radio event list of Refuges being activated for the event, as shown here:

2012 Planned Activations^a

National Wildlife Refuge & State	Activator	Call Sign	Dates/Times/Remarks
Alaska Maritime NWR - Alaska	KL2HD	KL7NWR	Oct. 11-15: 10, 12, 15, 18 & 20M depending on band conditions. SASE for QSL card or larger envelope for certificate to: KL2HD. See KL7NWR web page for more details.
Seney NWR - Michigan	Luca ARS & Lake Effect ARC	NBW	Oct. 14 & Oct. 19-20: 7.240, 14.240 & 14.070 MHz (+/-). Web site .
Kitlonds Warbler Wildlife Management Area - Michigan	Eagles Landing Radio Club	K1W	Oct. 11-17.
Sevillata NWR - New Mexico	Socorro Amateur Radio Assn.	NSB	Oct. 13, 1400-2200 UTC. NWR Week frequencies on 40M, 20-10M (including 17 & 12M) as band conditions allow. Send SASE for special event QSL card to W5AQA.
Minnesota Valley NWR - Minnesota	Amateur Radio Association of Bloomington	WB8WR	Oct. 20, 1400-2100 UTC: 7.195, 14.262 MHz. QSL via WB8GJ, 2215 Big Timer Road, Calmar, IA 52132.
Sullys Hill NWR - North Dakota	NDBB	NBW	Oct. 13 9:00 AM to 3:00 PM CDT on 20M and, as conditions allow, 15M & 10M.
Horizon NWR - Wisconsin	Rock River Radio Club	W1TCH	Oct. 20 from 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM CST (1500Z-2100 UTC). SSB on 80-10 meters depending conditions, and monitoring local 145.640 repeater with negative offset. Special QSL available via KB8OWD with SASE.
Trempealeau NWR - Wisconsin	W8EJQ	K9P	Oct. 20, 1400-2200 UTC: 80-10 meters.
	NWR Week Special Event Station	WAR	Oct. 14-20, HF bands as conditions allow running PSK31 and voice modes. QSL via SASE to K4RT .

After-Action Report:

National Wildlife Refuge Week 2012 *On the Air*

General Notes and Queries:

1. We got beat up by the weather. LARS volunteers were driven off the refuge by storms and Lake Effect shut down early the first day for the same reason.
2. Several visitors stayed with us for several minutes – they wanted to hear the chatter going on. We had to turn the audio volume up to uncomfortable levels for the operators to let the visitors hear. It would be worthwhile to have an extension speaker on the literature table so they could hear. This needs to be tested – it might require an additional power source to manage usefully, and power sources are at a premium as there are no commercial power outlets near the parking lot.

Concluding Notes:

This event continues to be a fun, satisfying event on both the technical and programmatic fronts.

Thanks to Refuge staff for their continuing support and encouragement, especially Jennifer McDonough and Sara Giles. Also to Jack Olson (KC8MJV), Sam Holmes (N8ATS), Marge Forslin (KD8AIL), John Forslin (KC8ULE) and Lucille Scotti (KD8PTE) for their participation and assistance, and to Brad Farrell (K4RT) for his coordination efforts for the national event.