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Counting Heads, Wings, Roots and More at a Superior BioBlitz

(Madison, WI) Every once in a while, nature needs to stop and take a head count. On July 24th, the Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin, with help from Department of Natural Resources (DNR), the University of Wisconsin – Superior’s Lake Superior Research Institute, the Great Lakes Aquarium and volunteers from throughout the state, will hold a day-long biological survey of Dwight’s Point State Natural Area in the Superior City Forest. The event, called a BioBlitz, is the last of three being held in Wisconsin this summer.

“BioBlitzes are kind of like a head count in nature,” noted Jeffrey Potter, coordinator of the events for the Foundation, “you’ve got just twelve hours to count as many species as you can.” Designed as part educational event, part scientific endeavor and part festival, BioBlitzes bring together scientists and the public to explore local biodiversity and the science used to measure and protect it. “We’re going to see how many different species we can find at Dwight’s Point in just twelve hours; it’s a lot of work, but it’s also a lot of fun” he said.

According to Thomas Meyer of the DNR’s State Natural Area program, the events are a great opportunity to learn about the day-to-day fieldwork conducted by conservation scientists around the state. “This is a great opportunity to work side-by-side with some of the state’s top field ecologists and have some fun learning about Wisconsin’s Great Lakes biodiversity,” Meyer said. Meyer is just one of more than 75 scientists volunteering for the events this summer.

While a few BioBlitzes have been held in Wisconsin before, none have been held at any of Wisconsin’s 600+ State Natural Areas. These specially designated areas are considered “the best of the best” remnants of original Wisconsin landscapes. “They represent a window into our past and a road map for how and why Wisconsin’s Great Lakes coastal habitat should be protected and restored now and in the future,” noted Meyer. “Dwight’s Point is one of our oldest and most valuable State Natural Areas, so it’s a great place to explore the past and present state of our environment,” he added.

Ecologists and scientists from the Department of Natural Resources, the University of Wisconsin – Superior, and the Great Lakes Aquarium will be on-hand to lead citizen-

scientist teams all day. And, as a special treat, the UW-Superior's Lake Superior Research Institute will offer an afternoon ride aboard their research vessel, the LL Smith, for a tour of the St. Louis Estuary and Dwight's Point and Pokegama wetlands. This treasured local water resource will be designated a National Estuarine Research Reserve by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) this fall, one of only two such reserves on the Great Lakes. The three-hour tour will include more information about the reserve, a demonstration of aquatic research and sampling techniques, and plenty of time for questions.

“This event is open to any one for any amount of time - come for a few hours or stay for the whole day” Potter said. The BioBlitz will run approximately twelve hours, from 6am to 6pm and is free and open to the public. Short, guided data collection trips throughout the day will include plants, insects, birds, mammals, trees, fish, amphibians and more. “If it lives at Dwight’s Point, we’ll be looking for it,” Potter said. The free boat tour is first-come first served and will depart from the BioBlitz at approximately 3pm.

If you're interested in participating in the BioBlitz, meet at the event “base camp” at the intersection of Billings Drive and 42nd Street in the Superior City Forest – there is a parking lot near the archery range. The parking lot will serve as the BioBlitz headquarters with a field lab for scientists, a special activity area for kids and families, and a small theater where guest speakers will offer short presentations on a host of topics throughout the day.

Guest speakers include Sue Mullholland from the Duluth Archeology Center, who will talk about the cultural history of the Western Lake Superior; Becky Sapper from the UW - Extension, who will talk about the National Estuarine Research Reserve and what it means for the region; and Loren Ayers, from the DNR, who will give a Wisconsin small mammal talk with live animals on display throughout the day.

Registration is recommended and free, but not required. Visit www.wisconservation.org and follow the “BioBlitz” link on the home page for details and more information.

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The Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization based in Madison, Wisconsin. For more than twenty years, the Foundation has worked with citizens, businesses, non-profits and the government to promote the protection and enjoyment of Wisconsin’s public lands, waters and wildlife. Learn more and donate online at www.wisconservation.org.

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