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Wetland to expand

Miller Marsh to grow from 38 acres to 215 acres

By JOHN MOLSEED
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Almost 200 acres of land in northeast Webster County is getting a facelift. County conservation is expanding the 38-acre Miller Marsh wetland to more than 215 acres.

This move will restore the land to its pre-pioneer condition. Not because the retro look is in, but because it's part of a plan to cut down on water pollution and give water fowl and plants more room to flourish.

Acquiring the land was a combination of good timing and luck, said Webster County Conservation Director Matt Cosgrove.

"With the price of land, I kind of figured we were out of the land-buying business," Cosgrove said.

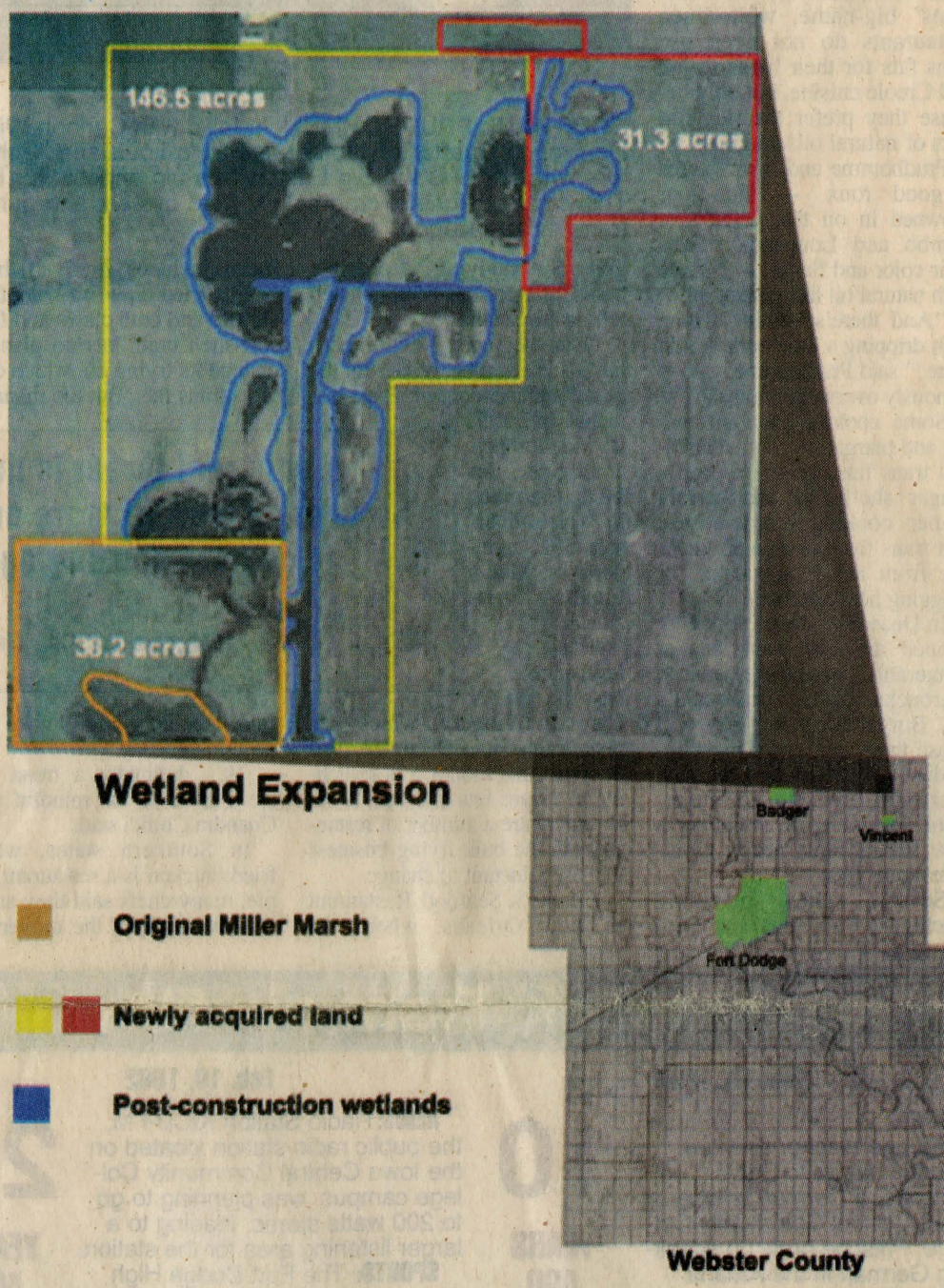
In July 2005, T.J. Lynn of Webster County Soil and Water Conservation was put in charge of the Brushy Lake watershed in the Brushy Creek State Recreation Area. His position is funded by the Natural Resources Conservation Services. Lynn has been building



Matt Cosgrove



T.J. Lynn



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-Messenger graphic by Christian Simon

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buffer strips, restoring small patches of wetland and working with farmers to prevent soil runoff.

The project sits at the northern tip of the drainage area from which the lake draws its water.

"This is by far the biggest project we have for that whole watershed," said Lynn. "It's a lot more than I expected to see."

Wetland was a common sight for early pioneers and settlers in north central Iowa. The area was known as the "thousand lakes" region to early settlers, according to the Iowa Association of Naturalists. This 7.6 million-acre region, known as the Des Moines Lobe, was dotted with prairie potholes and lakes.

Some lakes and ponds were drained. The plans for expanding the wetland involve plugging a century-old drainage tile and building earth dams that can be used to control the water levels in the area.

"This would be an old prairie

pothole," Lynn said looking at a map of the area. "This will really impact the water quality at Brushy."

Wetlands help filter and clean water before it enters rivers, streams and lakes, Cosgrove

water."

The Iowa Department of Transportation will shoulder most of the \$780,000 price tag of quintupling the wetland. It is kicking in \$518,000 toward buying adjoining land from

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—T.J. Lynn

Webster County Soil and Water Conservation

said. High nitrate content and other chemicals from farm runoff have polluted Iowa's water over the years. The Iowa Department of Natural Resources and NRCS have been taking steps to slow pollution and clean Iowa's waterways.

"For what needs to be done, this is it," Cosgrove said, pointing to the Miller Marsh plans.

"We need to let that water filter slowly and treat some of that

three property owners.

The DOT had been looking for about two years for an ideal wetland project to offset the impact of expanding U.S. Highway 20 to a four-lane expressway. Since the size of the project is larger than the highway project required, the DOT is only footing the bill for acquiring the land.

A state Wildlife Habitat Grant is contributing more than

\$148,000 to the project. The money comes from state hunting license fees and goes to improving habitat for wildlife. The Webster County Chapter of Pheasants Forever is also contributing \$25,000.

Webster County Conservation is kicking in \$50,000. That money comes from a conservation trust fund. Webster County allows conservation to put money left over from the end of the fiscal year into the fund.

"We keep that money for opportunities like this," said Cosgrove.

This expansion makes the Miller Marsh the third-largest county-owned wildlife area behind John F. Kennedy Memorial Park and the Bob Hay Memorial Conservation area.

The Miller Marsh is named after former Webster County Conservation Director Charlie Miller.

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