

STATE CONSERVATION REPORT

NEBRASKA • 2019

Grants awarded, conservation goals met, acres protected and new partnerships were all part of Ducks Unlimited's accomplishments in Nebraska in 2018. The Nebraska Environmental Trust awarded DU three grants and three more grants came from the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA). Crews completed 34 enhancement projects, conserving 3,283 acres and impacting 14,774 acres. We protected 893 acres with perpetual conservation easements and land acquisitions.

The partnerships DU develops make landscape conservation possible. In 2018, DU developed new partnerships with the Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality, U.S. Forest Service, Army Corps of Engineers, Crane Trust, Nebraska Land Trust, Bureau of Reclamation, and many private landowners.

The upcoming year will be a big one for habitat protection. We are finalizing several conservation easements on the North Platte River, and we have Wetland

Reserve Easements on five of our Revolving Habitat Program (RHP) lands. We will be divesting two properties in the Rainwater Basin. One we will transfer to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and the other will be sold as part of the RHP.

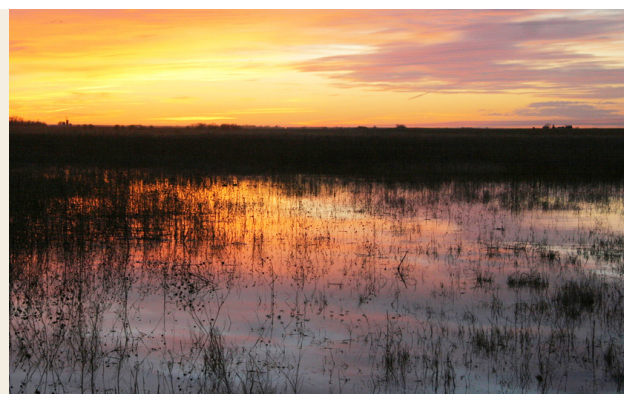
DU can conduct facilitative acquisitions where we acquire a property on behalf of another organization and then transfer the property to that organization once they are able to take on payment and management responsibilities. These organizations are not able to move as quickly as Ducks Unlimited and could miss an opportunity to purchase a property when it comes up for sale. We will be closing on one of these arrangements with the FWS soon.

We have several grants that will fund our work in 2019. We received \$300,000 from a Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality grant and \$455,000 from an internal FWS grant to purchase land. These are both new granting sources. Three of our proposals submitted to the Nebraska Environmental Trust were recommended for funding. These proposals will bring in a little more than \$500,000 for projects in the Rainwater Basin, Sandhills, Missouri River and North Platte River. This summer we will find out if we have been awarded a \$1 million NAWCA grant that will be used for restorations and enhancements in the Rainwater Basin.

*John Denton
Manager of Conservation Programs in Nebraska*

The Rainwater Basin will soon have more water for ducks and duck hunters

Migrating ducks and geese will soon find more places to stop and refuel in Nebraska. The Rainwater Basin (RWB) supports more than 8 million migratory waterfowl, shorebirds and other important species in the spring and about half of that number in the fall. Birds need the spring habitat to



replenish fat reserves and arrive on the northern prairie in the Dakotas and Canada in good physical condition for breeding and nesting.





Only about 10 percent of Nebraska's historic RWB wetlands remain today. Of those, some 8,500 acres hold water in an average spring. To minimize disease and malnutrition in waterfowl, scientists say almost 18,000 acres of RWB wetlands need to be flooded each spring.

"The lack of adequate wetland habitat causes overcrowding of waterfowl, which can contribute to disease outbreaks," said Mike George, DU director of conservation programs for Nebraska, Wyoming, Kansas and Colorado. "A severe outbreak could kill tens of thousands of birds."

To address this shortage of habitat, Ducks Unlimited is working with the Rainwater Basin Joint Venture and other partners to implement a long-range water plan for the Rainwater Basin. DU has established a dedicated, interest-accruing Rainwater Basin Water Development Fund, with a goal of raising \$12.1 million, which would meet the needs of migratory waterfowl in perpetuity.

DU and partners hope to restore 5,000 acres in the basin during the next 12 years. Another 4,500 acres must come from pumping and water delivery to existing wetlands. Though many of the existing playas are publicly owned by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, these agencies are unable to deliver this level of water on an annual basis.

Interest generated from the Rainwater Basin Water Development Fund will fund developing new wells and pumping water, as well as the infrastructure to distribute the water to wetlands. Roughly 85 to 90 percent of all pumping will occur on lands open to the public, which will provide more places to hunt along with other public benefits and positive local economic impacts.

Contact Terry Kostinec to support this conservation effort. (605) 760-5791 or tkostinec@ducks.org



DU supports Audubon's wildlife viewing project

Ducks Unlimited helped purchase a 577-acre property for wildlife viewing near Kearny, Nebraska. The property at Audubon's Rowe Sanctuary is just west of the Iain Nicolson Audubon Center, overlooking a wet meadow and a portion of the Platte River's south channel. These meadows are important habitat for cranes, waterfowl, grassland birds, and many more animals and insects.

The viewing area provides ample parking and features a viewing fence through which guests can watch cranes that commonly use the meadow for feeding and as a loafing area.

In addition to Ducks Unlimited, Audubon's partners on the project included The Nebraska Environmental Trust, Nebraska Wildlife Conservation Fund, Nebraska's Natural Legacy Project, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, Platte River Recovery Implementation Program, Central Platte Natural Resources District, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Partners for Fish and Wildlife, The Nature Conservancy, Main Street Design and Prairie Plains Resource Institute.

"This project isn't unique," stated Autumn Taddicken, Rowe Sanctuary project manager. "Nearly every conservation success on the Platte River is a story about conservation organizations, government agencies, private landowners, donors, volunteers, business, media and community members coming together to create positive outcomes for wildlife."

Wrapping up the Rescue Our Wetlands campaign



Rescue Our Wetlands Nebraska State Campaign Chair Jason Christiansen and his wife Sandy

DU's 7-year Rescue Our Wetlands national campaign concluded in 2018. The outstanding success of the more than \$2 billion fundraising campaign is a result of the efforts of DU volunteers, major donors and corporate partnerships across all 50 states. Major donor pledges start at \$10,000 and Nebraska brought in 135 of these pledges during the campaign, some ranging

Dan and Patty Kreitman

Paying it forward with support for DU youth programs

Dan Kreitman was introduced to Ducks Unlimited by his high school English teacher who took him to a DU banquet in the 1970s. Now he and his wife, Patty, are doing the same for other youth.

“In today’s world, we need to embrace our youth and introduce them to the outdoors. We must recruit them and retain them, otherwise we are going to lose our outdoor heritage,” Dan said.

The Nebraska couple were recently honored by the University of Nebraska Lincoln (UNL) Ducks Unlimited chapter for annually sponsoring six UNL students to go to DU’s Third Term leadership conference for university students. They also have dedicated a major gift to underwrite the conference. Dan’s commitment to youth was strengthened when he went to the UNL chapter banquet.

“I saw more energy at that banquet than I have seen in years. These college students are amazing. I knew our gift was well invested,” Dan said.



UNL Chapter volunteers presenting a Major Donor plaque at the Third Term leadership conference to Dan Kreitman

He says he may have never gotten involved in DU without his teacher, Paul Pack’s, involvement. The two started a DU chapter in Ceresco, Nebraska, in 1983. His mentor, who passed away four years ago, became his best friend. Dan has also gotten to know some of the students he has sponsored.

“One of their fathers invited me to come out and sit in a duck blind with them. I don’t know of a better place to learn about people than sitting together in a blind,” he said.

Patty and Dan also made a challenge gift to sponsor the Greenwings Puddler magazine that was matched by a California foundation. Dan is now a Nebraska Game and Parks commissioner. The Kreitman’s gifts will give the next generation the opportunity to learn about and embrace the challenge of conserving the great outdoors.



up to \$1 million. This private philanthropic support provides matching funds to secure millions of additional public dollars for conservation work on the Nebraska landscape. Forty-one Nebraska major donor commitments were signed in 2018 alone.

Nebraska State Campaign Chairman Jason Christiansen and his wife, Sandy, signed the final Nebraska pledge Dec. 31 to cap the end of the national campaign. Their Heritage Level pledge will provide support for the Rainwater Basin water fund, a new conservation fundraising effort that will lead DU’s efforts into 2019 and beyond.

The Revolving Habitat Program in the Rainwater Basin

The Revolving Habitat Program (RHP) allows Ducks Unlimited to purchase a property, restore and protect it, then sell it and reinvest the revenue into future property purchases and conservation efforts. In Nebraska, DU is turning around two Rainwater Basin properties. The first is in Phelps County with a restored wetland protected by a perpetual Natural Resources Conservation Services Wetlands Reserve Easement (WRE) with grazing rights.

“It is important to have a working lands component, like grazing rights, built into the conservation easement. This makes the property attractive to buyers, because they are able to use the land and incorporate it into their livestock operation,” said John Denton, manager of conservation programs in Nebraska.





Having grazing rights on the property allows for certain types of vegetation management to be implemented to keep the grassland healthy and productive for waterfowl and other wildlife.

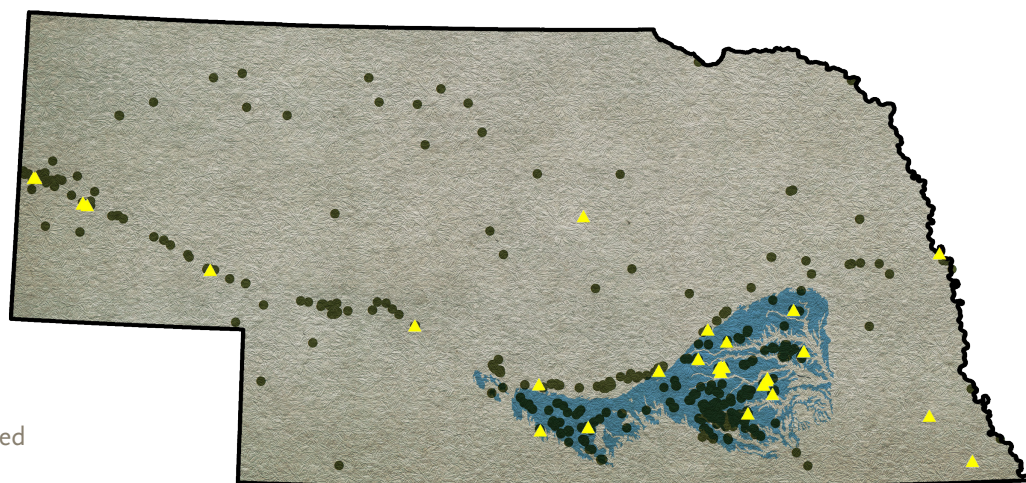
The second RHP property is in Fillmore County and is protected in perpetuity by a WRE with grazing rights. DU completed restoration of the property in September 2018, and shortly after, blue-winged and green-winged teal were using the property.

Contact John Denton for more information about these properties: (308) 258-4682 or jdenton@ducks.org

ducks unlimited NE PROJECTS 1984-2018

- Completed projects: 1984-2017
- ▲ 2018 Completed projects
- Rainwater Basin

Note: Project points may represent more than one project.



2018 Accomplishments*

2,314 acres protected, restored or enhanced
\$3,993,194 invested

*Based on numbers available 01/01/19

For information on event fundraising:

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Pat Baughman, Senior Regional Director - Western NE
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For information on DU's conservation programs:

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For information on Major Donor support and corporate partnerships:

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