

# STATE CONSERVATION REPORT

## Nebraska

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- John Denton, Manager of Conservation Programs

Ducks Unlimited can hang its hat on many conservation achievements in Nebraska during fiscal year 2019. Thirty-one projects were completed, conserving habitat on more than 20,000 acres. We protected three properties and transferred ownership to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to be managed as part of waterfowl production areas in Clay and Fillmore counties. These areas are open to public hunting and outdoor recreation. DU purchased two Revolving Habitat Program (RHP) lands in Phelps and Polk counties. Six RHP properties in the Rainwater Basin were protected with perpetual conservation easements.

In southwest Nebraska where playa wetlands are at risk, we helped enroll 717 acres across 26 properties in the Migratory Bird State Acres for

Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) Conservation Reserve Program. All wetlands on the properties are restored and then protected for 10 to 15 years.

We continue to work on reducing invasive plant species on private lands. Our crews sprayed more than 6,000 acres to knock back vegetation and improve the quality of wetlands in the Rainwater Basin and along the Platte River.

Numerous restoration and enhancement projects were completed in the Rainwater Basin via our partnership with the Rainwater Basin Joint Venture (RBJV). Ducks Unlimited serves on the board of the RBJV and is one of the funding and delivery partners. One project on the Funk Waterfowl Production Area in Phelps County will deliver thousands of gallons of water to the wetlands.

Our collaboration with other organizations helps extend the reach of our conservation efforts. In Nebraska we are cultivating partnerships with the Sandhills Task Force and Saline Wetlands Conservation Partnership. Using matching funds from these partner organizations and the RBJV, DU recently submitted two, \$1 million North American Wetlands Conservation Act grants to fund wetland protection and restoration activities in the Sandhills, Saline Wetlands and Rainwater Basin. Working with these already established partnerships in important wetland-rich landscapes allows us to pool our resources to make a greater conservation impact.

### More wetlands = less flooding

It is hard to imagine, but the recent flooding that caused so much hardship and destruction to Nebraskans could have been worse without intact wetlands or those that have been protected and restored. If we had more wetland acres across the landscape, it would have reduced flooding impacts. Nebraska has





lost at least 50 percent of its wetlands, with some areas having lost 90 percent or more.

Wetlands serve numerous ecosystem functions, like filtering pollutants to improve water quality and recharge aquifers, but they also function as natural sponges that trap and slowly release surface and flood waters from precipitation events. Wetland vegetation also slows flood waters and distributes them across the floodplain. This combined water storage and braking action lowers flood heights and reduces erosion.

Ducks Unlimited recognizes agriculture and wetlands can coexist, and our biologists strive for solutions that work to support the producer and the wetland habitat. Working lands conservation easements that help landowners conserve wetlands and continue to use the land are an important tool along the North Platte River. DU biologists also work with the Natural Resources Conservation Service to help landowners enroll in programs like Agricultural Land Easements, Wetland Reserve Easements, Wetland Reserve Easements with Reserved Grazing Rights and Wetland Reserve Enhancement Program that support habitat conservation and agriculture production. DU's involvement with the Rainwater Basin Joint Venture also facilitates wetland conservation in agriculture dominated landscapes that incorporate production related goals. Every wetland acre conserved helps reduce flooding. [Front page >>](#)



*Flooded county road (middle) and crop field with snow geese*

## New federal grant means more Rainwater Basin habitat



*Ducks in the Rainwater Basin*

Ducks Unlimited was recently awarded a \$1 million North American Wetlands Conservation Act grant to restore, enhance and protect more than 6,000 acres of Rainwater Basin (RWB) waterfowl habitat in south central Nebraska. The RWB includes nearly 4,200 square miles of wetlands that are important for millions of shorebirds, migrating waterfowl and other birds.

The grant will help DU complete public wetlands complexes by acquiring adjacent properties that share wetlands with the public land. The properties will become part of the complexes and open to the public.

“Wetland management capability will increase with staff not needing to worry about flooding adjacent private land,” said John Denton, DU’s Nebraska conservation manager.

Ducks Unlimited will improve water delivery to five large public playa wetlands owned by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Other work will restore the natural hydrology of wetlands by filling pits that prevent wetland function. Ducks Unlimited will add grazing infrastructure and remove invasive plants to make room for seed-producing plants while preventing invasive plant reestablishment, which benefits migratory waterfowl and other species.

Every grant dollar will be matched by \$2 in private funds from DU and partners, including the Rainwater Basin Joint Venture, Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District, Nebraska Community Foundation, Nebraska Environmental Trust and Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. [Front page >>](#)



## DU honors Marsh Keepers in Nebraska

Since its founding in 1937, Ducks Unlimited continues to succeed thanks to Major Sponsors and volunteers. Ducks Unlimited held a conservation celebration in August to honor those who have been an integral part of the history and continued success of DU in Nebraska.

Dubbed the Marsh Keepers, the event consisted of a social hour, invocation, dinner, live auction and recognition ceremonies. Items auctioned included several hunting trips, original art work, a custom hunting knife and a DU Benelli shotgun.

“The event turned out great, it was kind of like a family reunion,” said Regional Director Steve Wilson. “It’s been 20 or 30 years since some of these volunteers and major sponsors were together.”

More than 50 people were honored, including long-term volunteers, past state chairs, regional directors, Ducks Unlimited artists from Nebraska and others who have played a significant part in the continued growth of DU and its conservation accomplishments in Nebraska and across the country. [Front page >>](#)



*DU Regional Director Steve Wilson emceeding the evening's events.*



*Wetlands America Trust Board Member Bruce Lauritzen (middle) accepts Nebraska Legend of Conservation Award on behalf of his father John Lauritzen. Bruce also accepted the Gate Keepers Award on behalf of First National Bank.*



## Ducks Unlimited helps Fontenelle Forest expand conservation education area

Ducks Unlimited is helping Fontenelle Forest conserve habitat and incorporate wetlands into their education programs. Fontenelle Forest is an educational conservation non-profit organization south of Omaha that fosters an appreciation of nature. DU dedicated North American Wetlands

Conservation Act (NAWCA) funding to purchase a tract of wetland habitat that will add to the forest's Neale Woods tract along the Missouri River.

“We want to make people aware of the impacts wetlands have on their everyday lives. Wetlands provide clean water, groundwater recharge and reduce flooding,” said John Denton, DU manager of conservation programs in Nebraska.

The Fontenelle Forest will manage the wetlands, which are south of Boyer Chute National Wildlife Refuge, for waterfowl and other wildlife. Depending on funding, future development of the wetland area will include removal of derelict structures and adding a boardwalk and interpretive signs to educate visitors about Ducks Unlimited's wetland and waterfowl conservation efforts.

The mission of Fontenelle Forest is to provide a place where people can experience nature and inspire future generations to care for outdoor spaces. The sentiment of leaving something for future generations is also a priority of Ducks Unlimited. The conservation goals and education priorities of Fontenelle Forest align with DU's vision, which makes this partnership a strong one.

Visit [www.fontenelleforest.org](http://www.fontenelleforest.org) for more information about their programs.

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Wetland at Memphis Lake State Recreation Area

## Restoration at Memphis Lake improves outdoor experiences

The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission (NGPC) partnered with Ducks Unlimited to restore an 88-acre wetland and lake on Memphis Lake State Recreation Area (SRA) in Saunders County. DU provided engineering and construction oversight for the project that was completed in April. Funding for the restorations was provided by the Nebraska Environmental Trust and NGPC.

Memphis Lake is a man-made lake, formerly used to provide ice to Omaha and Chicago. Today, it is a popular recreation area for camping, canoeing and fishing. Past restorations to the wetland on the north side of Memphis Lake were unsuccessful for long-term

waterfowl habitat management. At the time, ditches were dug to provide deeper water for duck broods. This restoration practice was widely used on the prairies but did not fit the habitat requirements at Memphis Lake and over time proved ineffective. Trees and brush over ran the area and impeded waterfowl use.

“Restoration crews improved many aspects of the wetland, including recontouring the bottom to create a variety of water depths that will attract different waterfowl species,” said John Denton, DU manager of conservation programs for Nebraska. “This project will improve water quality in Memphis Lake and provide hunting, birding and hiking opportunities that will positively impact the economy in nearby Memphis.”

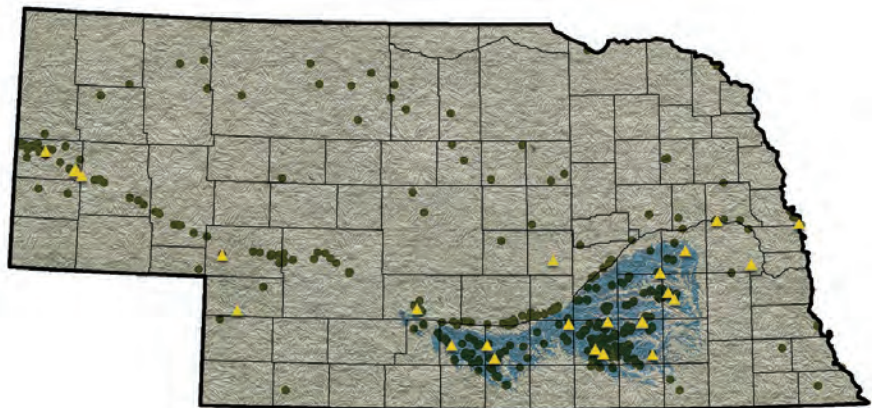
Restoration crews removed trees and vegetation from the wetland and surrounding dikes. Crews repaired dikes, installed a water control structure to divide the wetland from Memphis Lake, improved the ditch that delivers water to the wetland from Silver Creek and built a drawdown structure to remove water from the wetland. These improvements facilitate access by management equipment and allow water level management that promotes growth of beneficial vegetation. [Front page >>](#)

## PROJECTS

1984 through the end of Fiscal Year 2019

- Completed projects
- ▲ 2019 Fiscal Year Projects
- Rainwater Basin

- Impacted Acres\*
  - 20,873 acres protected, restored, and/or enhanced
- Dollars Invested - \$2,290,743
- Public Income\*\* - \$2,110,148



\*Impacted acres combine unique conservation acres with acres where DU has multiple project objectives.

\*\* Income generated through partners, grants, and leases on DU properties.

[Visit the new Nebraska interactive project map >>](#)

## Nebraska State Contacts:

### For information on DU's conservation programs:

John Denton, Manager of Conservation Programs - NE  
jdenton@ducks.org • (308) 258-4682

### For information on Major Donor support or corporate partnership:

Terry Kostinec, Director of Development - SD, NE  
tkostinec@ducks.org • (605) 760-5791

### For information on event fundraising:

Michael J. Dudzinski, State Chair - NE  
michael.d4@cox.net • (402) 740-4896

Pat Baughman, Senior Regional Director - Western NE  
pbaughman@ducks.org • (308) 380-1711

Steve Wilson, Senior Regional Director - Eastern NE  
swilson@ducks.org • (402) 499-5515

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