

DU CONSERVATION REPORT

North Dakota
2018



For the Ducks Unlimited conservation team, 2017 was a banner year for protection, restoration and enhancement of waterfowl habitat in North Dakota. Through expanded partnerships and accelerated efforts, DU restored and enhanced 17,942 acres of habitat. In partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), DU's primary tool for waterfowl conservation is the conservation easement. The FWS easement program allows landowners to ensure habitat remains intact, maintain their agricultural operation and be compensated for their efforts. In 2017, the partnership between DU and FWS protected 25,375 acres of grasslands and 17,987 of wetlands. To date, the partnership has protected more than one million acres in the Dakotas.

To accomplish long-term habitat goals, biologists are presenting farmers and ranchers a variety of programs that provide alternative conservation

options, in addition to conservation easements. After consulting with landowners, DU and its partners developed complimentary, short-term working lands programs that provide waterfowl habitat by protecting the wetlands embedded in those fields. These practices benefit breeding waterfowl, contribute to soil and water health, and improve profitability and sustainability on North Dakota farms and ranches.

The availability of Farm Bill conservation programs is critical and DU continues to support the North Dakota Association of Soil Conservation District conservation specialists who focus on Natural Resource Conservation Service and Farm Service Agency programs. With the assistance of these conservation specialists, the 2017 Conservation Reserve Program accepted 38,972 acres in North Dakota. However, that number represents a less than 7 percent acceptance rate for the state. This is a strong indication producers are interested in grass-based programs, but the current programs are underfunded and oversubscribed. Additionally, 50,614 acres of Environmental Quality Incentive Program practices and 126,793 acres of Conservation Stewardship Program land were enrolled by the end of the fiscal year. The specialists and biologists worked with more than 500 landowners in the Prairie Pothole Region in North Dakota this year.



OHF PROJECT IMPROVES HABITAT FOR DUCKS AND PIPING PLOVERS

With funding from North Dakota’s Outdoor Heritage Fund (OHF) and the North American Wetlands Conservation Act, Ducks Unlimited completed its portion of repairs to a dike on Long Lake National Wildlife Refuge. The dike is on the south shore of Long Lake and separates the lake from a 700-acre wetland area. During 2011, severe flooding significantly damaged the dike and left several sections breached.

DU repaired a section of the two-mile dike adding dirt and rip-rap. The repair also increased the elevation of the dike by one-and-a-half feet to reduce future impacts from flooding events.

“The dike serves as an access road for Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) staff to access a water-control structure and other portions of the refuge,” said Chad Haschen, DU engineering technician and lead designer for this project. “The dike is a nesting area for piping plovers. We used gravel that plovers prefer for nesting during the dike repair.”

As part of the restoration, DU worked with FWS to determine an appropriate native grass mix to reseed the dike and surrounding areas. The marsh on the opposite side of the dike from the lake has significant waterfowl use. Refuge staff manually operate the water-control structure to manage water levels in the marsh. The FWS will complete repairs to the remaining portion of the dike to ensure optimal water levels for beneficial wetland vegetation growth and water bird use.

GRASSLANDS ENHANCEMENT PILOT PROJECT IN BAKKEN

Ducks Unlimited and the North Dakota Natural Resources Trust are providing ranchers who lease State School Trust and other public lands in the Bakken oil field an opportunity to cost-share rotational grazing infrastructure. The Grasslands Enhancement Pilot Project (GEPP), funded through North Dakota’s Outdoor Heritage Fund, provides incentives for lessees to transition to rotational grazing by helping fund improvements such as cross-fencing, water supply and power. The objective of the program is to improve rangeland health, plant diversity, drought tolerance and water quality.

Rotational grazing mimics bison moving across the landscape, which is how native grasslands evolved in North Dakota. The rotation of cattle provides rest and recovery for pastures, more

equally distributes manure and diversifies grass height. This technique decreases the abundance of non-native species like Kentucky bluegrass and allows native grasses to thrive.

“We have one project on the ground at a waterfowl production area, which is public land, in McLean County,” said Dane Buysse, Ducks Unlimited biologist in North Dakota. “We are promoting grazing across the 750-acre property by installing water resources and fencing for the cattle.”

As native species dominate the habitat, soil quality improves along with its water permeability. This makes plants more drought tolerant so there will be food for cattle in times of sparse rain. The ground can soak up more water in times of abundant rain, which can decrease impacts of flooding in neighboring communities.

“This program is a win for everyone. Ranchers moving cattle to public land lets them rest their private land. Public land managers benefit because rotational grazing improves cover for wildlife and provides better public hunting opportunities,” Buysse said.

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WORKING LANDS PROGRAM WILL INCORPORATE LIVESTOCK



North Dakota agricultural producers can get help diversifying their operations and improving soil health. Ducks Unlimited and its partners worked with producers in southeast North Dakota to build a simple, useful program called the Cover Crop and Livestock Integration Project (CCLIP). CCLIP provides financial assistance to farmers and ranchers to add sustainable, mixed-operation practices.

“Integrating livestock on small grain and row crop farmland is incredibly beneficial. The hoof action stimulates plant root growth and livestock manure enhances nutrient cycling. Cover crops provide great forage for livestock,” said Tanner Gue, Ducks Unlimited regional biologist.

Gue says cover crops suppress weeds, pests and disease. They also increase the soil’s ability to hold water which reduces surface runoff and sedimentation in wetlands, streams and rivers. By diversifying crop rotations, reducing tillage and incorporating cover crops,

producers can improve soil structure, water infiltration and storage, and increase organic matter and microbial diversity in their soil.

“This diversified system can be more efficient than other inputs for cash crops, it is less expensive for producers and makes full use of their land year round,” Gue said.

CCLIP covers 60 percent of infrastructure costs like fencing, deep wells, pipe, tanks and cover crop seed. DU received a grant from the North Dakota Outdoor Heritage Fund (OHF) to provide more than half of the project costs and assist with the financial risk with integrating livestock with cropland.

The success of the OHF grant is due to the partnerships of Pulse USA, North Dakota Natural Resources Trust, local soil conservation districts and the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

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HELP DU RESCUE OUR WETLANDS!

In 2012, Ducks Unlimited began the largest wetlands conservation campaign ever undertaken by any organization, *Rescue our Wetlands: Banding Together for Waterfowl*. The goal was to raise \$2 billion toward its conservation mission to curb habitat loss and fill the skies with waterfowl today, tomorrow and forever. Since then, DU and its supporters have raised \$1.93 billion. The campaign wraps up at the end of 2018.

While DU is close to its goal, it is not there yet and it’s not too late to get involved. Dollars raised at fundraising events and major sponsor gifts all count. With the funds raised, DU will conserve record numbers of acres in North Dakota and across the continent, that benefit waterfowl, other wildlife and people.

“We’re thankful to many North Dakota supporters, like Tom and Katie Hutchens, Craig and Shelley Larson, John and Barb Hipp and Starion Bank who have all made significant

major gift contributions in 2017 to help finish the campaign off strong,” said Eric Lindstrom, managing director of development for the Great Plains.

Major sponsors and Greenwing legacy members in North Dakota who make a commitment during the campaign will be recognized on a special bronze plaque at Long Lake National Wildlife Refuge where DU partnered with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on restorations. DU will hold a dedication in 2019 after the close of the campaign.

If you are interested in learning more about how you can help *Rescue our Wetlands*, contact the North Dakota fundraising staff.

For information on becoming a Major Sponsor:
Chris Hildebrandt, Director of Development
childebrandt@ducks.org or 406-203-2503

For Greenwing Legacy information:
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ERIC LINDSTROM – MANAGING DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT FOR THE GREAT PLAINS

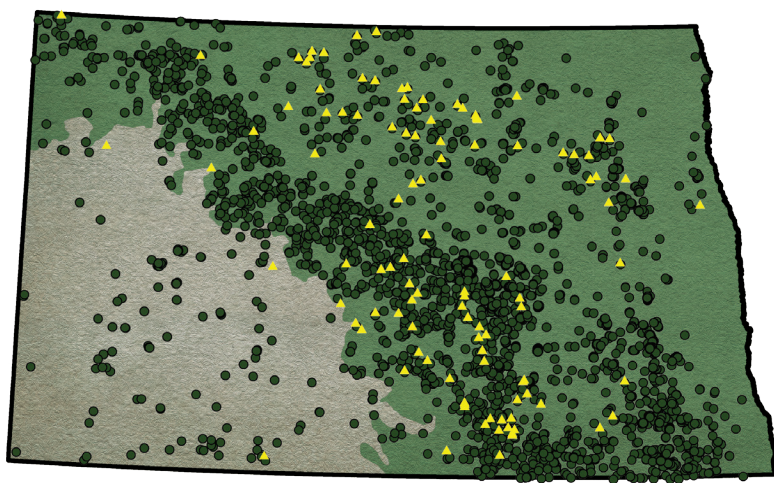
Ducks Unlimited's former National Manager of Agriculture Policy Eric Lindstrom is now the managing director of development for the Great Plains Region. Eric's new responsibilities include working with DU's major gift supporters and partners, managing the Great Plains Region development team and overseeing budget responsibilities for the region. In his 12 years working at Ducks Unlimited, Eric has worked with staff, volunteers, partners and policy makers to help advance DU's conservation, policy and fundraising goals. He and his wife, Kristin, live in Bismarck.

Eric Lindstrom
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ducks unlimited ND PROJECTS 1984-2017

- Completed projects
- ▲ 2017 Completed projects

Note: Project points may represent more than one project.



in 2017 | 48,265 acres conserved • \$7,157,296 invested

Prairie Pothole Region

The Prairie Pothole Region is a lush ecosystem of wetlands and grasslands and provides highly productive waterfowl nesting and breeding habitat.

ND STATE CONTACTS

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GREAT PLAINS REGION

our mission

Ducks Unlimited conserves, restores, and manages wetlands and associated habitats for North America's waterfowl. These habitats also benefit other wildlife and people.