



80 Years of Conservation

# DU CONSERVATION REPORT 2017

## (NORTH DAKOTA)

Ducks Unlimited's North Dakota conservation team accomplished several habitat objectives in 2016. In partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), Ducks Unlimited uses conservation easements as the primary tool for wetland and grassland protection. The FWS easement program provides landowners the ability to continue to work their land while being compensated for ensuring habitat remains in perpetuity. In 2016, the

partnership protected 21,579 acres of grasslands and 14,394 of wetlands in the Prairie Pothole Region.

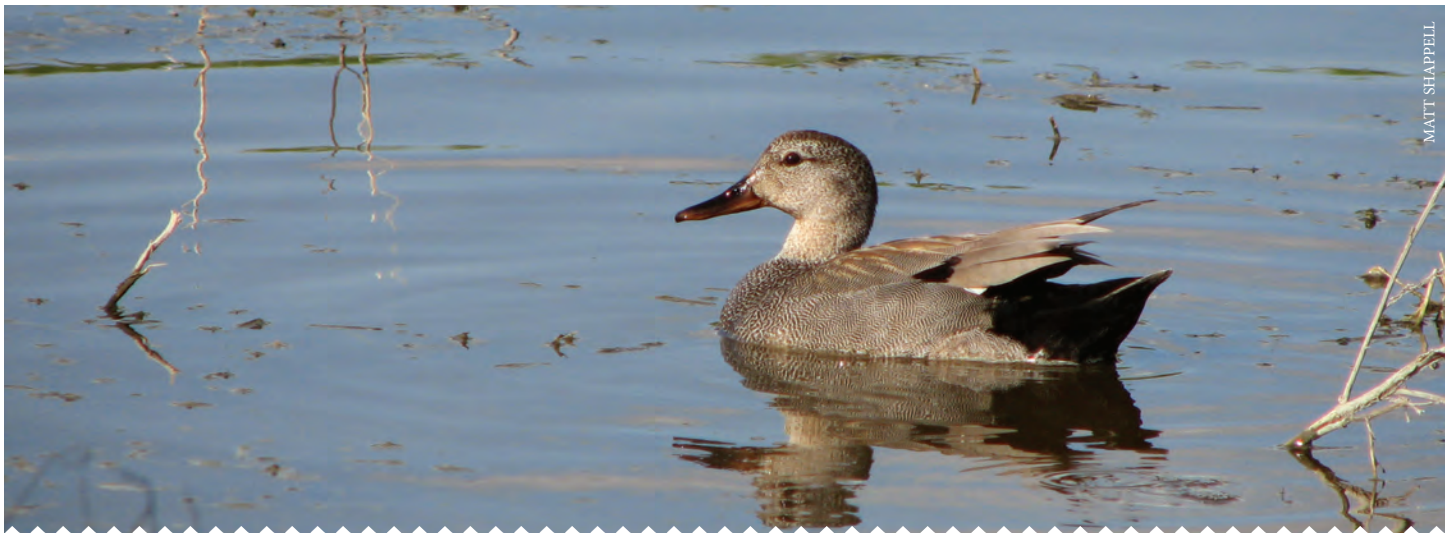
Ducks Unlimited biologists and Soil Conservation District farm bill specialists provided more than 500 landowners with technical assistance to evaluate options, develop conservation plans, and work through enrollment paperwork for voluntary conservation programs. During the

2016 Conservation Reserve Program sign-up, 2,174 acres were accepted into the program. However, there was a less than 7 percent acceptance rate in North Dakota due to minimal funds available and hundreds of applications. This is a strong indication that producers are interested in grass-based programs but the current programs are underfunded and oversubscribed. Additionally, 6,316 acres of Environmental Quality Incentive Program

practices and 1,900 acres of Conservation Stewardship Program lands were enrolled by the end of the fiscal year.

It was an excellent year for public grant awards. The North American Wetland Conservation Act funded a proposal called At-risk Prairie Pothole Conservation. This grant will provide \$1.2 million for wetland easements and restoration, emphasizing a working-lands approach in high wetland density areas.

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MATT SHAPPELL





Researcher sets up nest cam on DU's Coteau Ranch.

## UND AND DU NEST CAMERA RESEARCH

In 2016, Ducks Unlimited and the University of North Dakota (UND) expanded the 2015 Coteau Ranch research on blue-winged teal. DU added a study area on The Nature Conservancy's neighboring Davis Ranch and another waterfowl species – the mallard. Ducks Unlimited hired two UND student technicians to assist with the expansion of the project and help oversee two UND interns. Funds from the Enbridge Ecofootprint Grant Program and Minnesota Association of Resource Conservation and Development Councils facilitated this expansion of the study. The U.S. Geological Survey Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center provided field equipment.

Interns and technicians searched 1,317 acres of habitat, located 258 waterfowl nests and collected video camera data on 44 waterfowl nests. Aside from learning about field data collection, nesting ecology and nest camera use, the interns gained experience using different tools and methods to communicate their research to various audiences. They used ArcGIS, a mapping program, to develop maps of nesting ducks for conservation managers each week and spent a morning on the prairie instructing high school students about the nesting ecology of waterfowl and their video research techniques. Ducks Unlimited TV communications staff taught them about how to share scientific information with an even broader audience.

The skills the students learned will not only be helpful in their careers as wildlife biologists but will help them communicate with citizen scientists on the UND Wildlife@Home webpage where the nest videos are posted. Thus far, there are 543 individuals helping watch videos on the UND's citizen science webpage. In a recent survey of those who participated, less than 5 percent of the citizen scientists had a natural resource background and many came from outside the United States.

## DU PROGRAM HELPS DEVILS LAKE AREA LANDOWNERS

For landowners in the Devils Lake watershed, flooding and low crop prices have made farming some fields difficult and less profitable. A new DU program will help address problems with water and nonproductive cropland. The program can provide cost sharing for landowners wanting to turn marginal cropland and expiring Conservation Reserve Program acres into grazing land.

"The point of this program is to keep the land working while providing habitat for wildlife," said Tanner Gue, a Ducks Unlimited biologist who works with landowners in the watershed. "Landowners can use the land for livestock grazing and hay it, so it will continue to be useful to farmers and ranchers."

Roger Kenner was the first landowner who used the program to expand his ranching operation near Leeds by converting 82 acres of cropland back to grassland. There are six acres of wetlands in this grassland. Small, temporary basins provide the most critical resources for ducks during breeding season.

"We planted grass this summer and we've already got grouse in there," Kenner said.



Grassland, wetland, and fencing on Roger Kenner's property

"Fence is going up as we speak. Water tanks will be put in soon. This will be a great addition to my operation."

Producers with land in the Devils Lake watershed can get help with grass restoration, fencing and watering systems for livestock production, and assistance in developing rotational grazing plans. The watershed runs through most of Ramsey County and parts of Walsh, Benson, Towner, Nelson, Pierce, and Eddy counties.

Enbridge Ecofootprint Program is funding the project through the Minnesota Association of Resource Conservation and Development. Biologists with Ducks Unlimited and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program are assisting landowners who want to apply for the cost-share.

"Working with folks from Ducks Unlimited and the Partners for Fish and Wildlife on projects like this is a great experience," Kenner said.

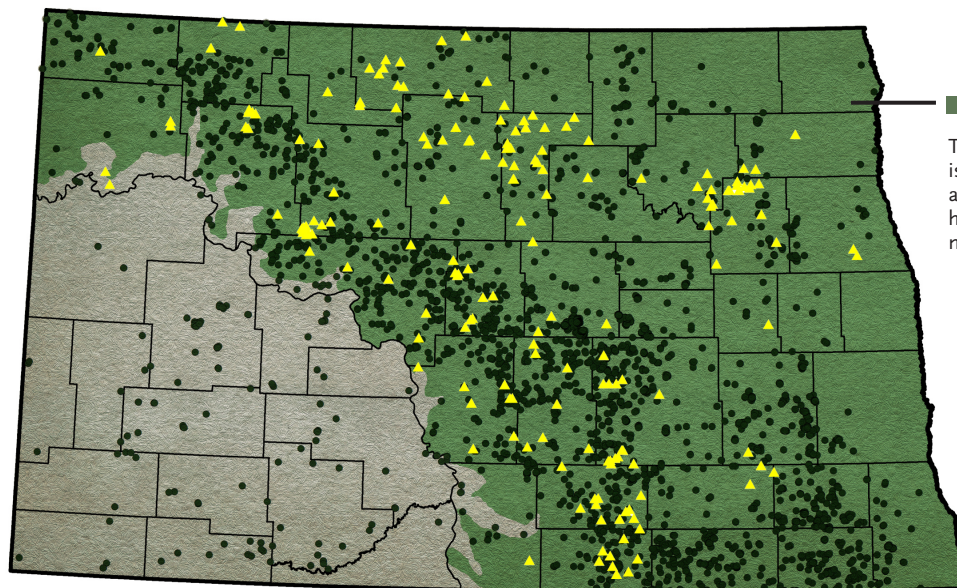
"They have the expertise to get things done right and get it done quickly for producers and for wildlife."

## ducks unlimited ND PROJECTS 1984-2016

● Completed projects - YTD

▲ 2016 Completed projects

Note: Project points may represent more than one project.



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

**2016 Accomplishments** | 67,310 acres conserved • \$10,908,468 invested



Terry (right) and his family, wife Laura, daughters Jaisa (9) and Olivia (5), and son Hunter (7).

## MEET YOUR REGIONAL DIRECTOR

Terry Lassiter is North Dakota's new regional director. He is originally from Princeton, Iowa, near Davenport where he attended his first Ducks Unlimited event in 1982. Terry still owns some of the items he won there.

Terry's grandfather, Paul Kernan, and family friend, Erle Etzel, introduced him to DU and fostered his interests in the outdoors and hunting. Terry has logged many hours as a volunteer for Ducks Unlimited, Delta Waterfowl, Mississippi Valley Sportsmen, and his church. He understands what it takes to maintain and recruit good people to support an organization as well as raise funds for the organization.

Terry and his family reside in Valley City, North Dakota.

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A Natural Resources Conservation Service Regional Conservation Partnership Program proposal was also funded, providing \$4.1 million for water and soil health concerns through incentivized working-lands programs in targeted watersheds in North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, and Minnesota. The project will positively influence more than 40,000 acres of habitat in the prairie states. In North Dakota, DU recently transferred two properties in Kidder County to the North Dakota Game and Fish Department. The properties were donated to DU and then gifted to the department, increasing the amount of land that will remain in public use and recreation while providing habitat for breeding waterfowl.

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## ND STATE CONTACTS

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### *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.