

South Dakota Ducks Unlimited

2019 Annual Report

South Dakota Ducks Unlimited closed the 2018 calendar year again riding high on the wave of success. Making this possible were the many volunteers who contributed hundreds of hours planning, organizing, and attending DU events across the state raising money for the ducks. Other volunteers played an active role behind the scenes informing and discussing issues and actions impacting conservation in our state with legislators, community groups, and industry leaders. Other volunteers served by mentoring youth, inspiring and educating a new generation of DU

leaders. As a result, South Dakota DU played a major role in exceeding the goals of the *Rescue Our Wetlands* campaign and furthering the habitat goals that support our state's precious waterfowl populations. South Dakota DU has much to be grateful for, and owes a heartfelt "thanks" to its strong army of devoted volunteers.

South Dakota DU currently has over 600 volunteers hosting 60 fundraising events throughout the year. This year's 2019 State Convention in Pierre will be

the venue for recognizing and honoring volunteers serving 20, 30 and even 40 years of service. South Dakota DU boasts over 100 volunteers who have helped protect wildlife habitat for over 20 years; of

these, 10 have served for over 30 years! South Dakota DU volunteers are among a remarkable group of people devoted to conservation, serving as role models and inspiring others at the local, state, and national level.



Long-time SDDU volunteer Maynard Isaacson has devoted over 40 years to South Dakota Ducks Unlimited.

Mention the name Maynard Isaacson, and it's not long before someone also mentions South Dakota DU, and for good reason. Maynard has been volunteering since 1978. He has generously served in a variety of volunteer positions. His titles include Committee Member, Chapter Treasurer, State Chairman, and he currently serves as the South Dakota Major Donor Campaign Chair.

Throughout the years, he's seen South Dakota DU grow from a handful of chapters to over 50 chapters blanketing the state. He stated, "While there may be a bunch of us old-timers still volunteering, what is exciting is there are over 500 younger volunteers and more joining our ranks all the time". Maynard continued, "When I first started volunteering in 1978, DU spent the majority of their money on habitat in Canada, but that changed in 1983, and since then DU has invested over 100 million dollars in South Dakota habitat". As the senior volunteer for South Dakota DU, Maynard's exemplary service to the ducks is, in fact, awesome! Thank you Maynard!

Habitat Restoration and Enhancement 2018

DU's Commitment to Soil Health, Clean Water & Waterfowl

Ducks Unlimited and its conservation partners enjoyed another successful year working with farmers and ranchers on a variety of habitat restoration and enhancement projects. Over 22,000 acres of important waterfowl habitat were restored or enhanced through a variety of projects across this important landscape through a total investment of \$3.14 million. One of the most impactful programs supported by DU funding is a partnership with numerous conservation districts throughout South Dakota, particularly within the Prairie Pothole Region (PPR). The most sought-after service provided to landowners by conservation districts is assistance with grassland seeding. When landowners enroll marginal cropland into the Conservation Reserve Program or have other reasons to seed cropland back to grasses and forbs, they often contract with the local conservation district to accomplish the project because the district has the right type of planting equipment and expertise to get the job done successfully. DU is often asked by the Conservation Districts for funding assistance to acquire no-till grass drills. In 2018, over 15,600 acres of marginal croplands were seeded to grassland species in 12 counties in the state through this partnership with DU.

*Over 22,000 acres
of important
waterfowl habitat
were restored or
enhanced in 2018...*

Through the Soil Health Initiative, DU is also impacting thousands of acres of habitat in the PPR. This rapidly growing initiative is expected to become one of DU's largest efforts in coming years. Conservation practices

promoted through the Soil Health Initiative will not only benefit waterfowl, but also provide significant benefits to soil conservation, water quality and the financial well-being of our states' farmers and ranchers. Over 2,700 acres of cropland were enhanced during 2018, primarily through the planting of cover crops, which improve soil health and offer a variety of benefits to wildlife, including waterfowl. DU also assists landowners with efforts to restore and enhance grassland habitats in areas with abundant wetlands. Over 1,300 acres of grasslands were seeded or enhanced

through the adoption of improved grazing systems during the past year. Habitat restoration and enhancement on DU owned properties are also significant components of the program. Approximately 330 acres of grassland and wetland habitats were restored on DU-owned properties through the Revolving Habitat Program. Habitat restored through this program will also be permanently protected.

2018 at a glance...

SDDU Program	2018 Accomplishments	DU Expenditures
Revolving Habitat Program	1,418 acres	\$4,984,221
Conservation Easements	44,564 acres	\$3,046,635
Habitat Restoration/Enhancement	22,039 acres	\$3,140,938
Total Conservation Investment:		\$11,171,794

Revolving Habitat Program 2018

*DU's Commitment to Restoring &
Protecting Waterfowl Habitat for Generations*

The Revolving Habitat Program (RHP) continues to be a strategically important component of DU's conservation efforts in South Dakota. During the fiscal year that ended June 30, 2018, DU successfully



Restoration work begins on an acquired property. (top) Habitat restoration and enhancement work completed. (middle) Wetland and grassland fully restored through the RHP program. (bottom)

acquired five additional properties through this innovative program. The acquired properties totaled over 1,400 acres and were purchased from willing sellers at a cost of \$4.98 million. The RHP is a unique conservation tool, according to DU's Manager of Conservation Programs Steve Donovan. "I don't know of any other organization or agency that uses this creative conservation tool, particularly in the Prairie Pothole Region", said Donovan. Under this program, DU identifies properties that are listed for sale, but also offer important opportunities to protect and restore priority waterfowl habitat. "The properties that we decide to purchase are the best of the best in terms of the potential to protect and restore important waterfowl breeding habitat", added Donovan, who noted that DU uses this tool sparingly.

In those instances where DU successfully buys these unique properties, habitat is then restored and protected with perpetual conservation easements, usually by working through an existing Federally managed easement program. After important habitat is protected in perpetuity, DU then sells the properties, usually to a local farmer or rancher who then operates the property for agricultural uses that are compatible with the protection and management of waterfowl habitat. During the past year, DU was able to revolve out of the program three properties, all in Brown County. The sale of conservation easements and the three parcels generated \$1,834,000 back into the RHP to be used for future projects. Through the life of this program, DU has already protected and revolved over 33,000 acres of vitally important waterfowl habitat. DU currently owns over 7,200 acres that are in the process of being restored and protected. All the land in the program is open to the public for hunting purposes while it is owned by Ducks Unlimited.

Conservation Easement Program 2018

DU's Commitment to Partnerships for Conservation

Ducks Unlimited's conservation easement program experienced another exceptional year in 2018. Conservation easements are an important tool in delivering DU's conservation programs in the Prairie Pothole Region (PPR), particularly in the portion of the PPR within the United States. Securing wetlands and grassland nesting cover through perpetual conservation easements ensures that not only is habitat protected for this generation, but future generations of waterfowlers and wildlife enthusiasts will be able to enjoy the same wonderful resources we enjoy today. The partnership between DU and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) is the best and most productive conservation easement program utilized within South Dakota.

Through this partnership, DU provides financial and technical resources to help FWS secure both wetland and grasslands easements that permanently protect important waterfowl habitats. DU spent slightly more than \$3 million in 2018 to permanently protect over 6,000 acres of habitat. In addition, another 38,000 acres were protected by FWS with the help of technical assistance provided by DU staff. DU realty specialists provide critically important human resources and assist with a variety of tasks necessary to secure conservation easements. In total, 44,564 acres of habitat, including 38,695 acres of grassland

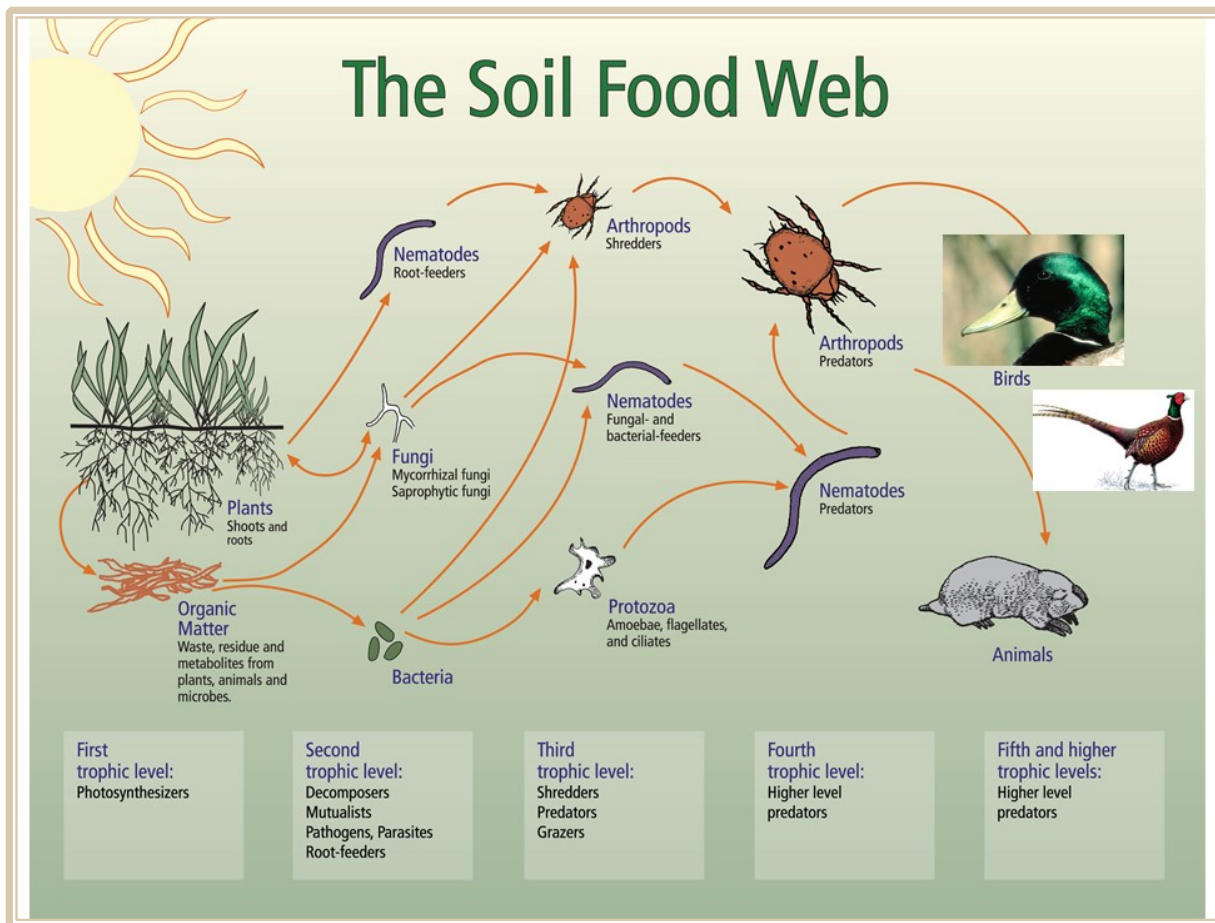
*Perpetual
conservation
easements ensure
that habitat is
protected not only
for this generation
of waterfowlers, but
also for those of
future generations...*

and 5,869 acres of wetlands were permanently protected. According to Mark Heisinger, DU conservation easement specialist who helps FWS secure conservation easements, interest in the program remains high. "The list of South Dakota landowners interested in the program is long and far exceeds the current available funding", said Heisinger. This is one of the reasons DU works so hard to secure major donor funds for the easement program. "It is important that we work with these landowners right now while they are interested in protecting wetlands and native grasslands", added Heisinger. In addition to efforts intended to raise private funds, DU is continuing efforts to influence various public policies to help sustain healthy levels of funding for conservation easement programs, including funding for the FWS easement program and the Wetlands Reserve Easement program offered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. At the same time, DU must remain vigilant to frequent efforts to abolish or significantly limit perpetual conservation easements. Despite the high popularity of the easement program among South Dakota landowners, there are critics of easements, including some elected officials who don't believe in the idea of perpetual protection of wetlands and grassland habitats. Ducks Unlimited and our many conservation partners will continue to work hard to ensure that this valuable land protection tool remains available to South Dakota landowners.

Soil Health “Regenerative Agriculture” Program 2018

DU's Commitment to Soil Health, Clean Water and Productive Wildlife Habitat

“Did you know there are more living organisms in a teaspoonful of healthy soil than there are people on the planet?” was a question posed by Brad Schmidt, DU’s lead agronomist, to a meeting of the Brookings Wildlife Federation recently. The problem, explained Schmidt, is that most of our soil is not healthy. Decades of abusive soil management practices have decimated healthy soils and produced widespread environmental damage, including harmful impacts to waterfowl habitat. Negative impacts include a multitude of problems, including: a significant loss of topsoil from farmlands, excessive algae growth in our lakes, the rapid expansion of saline and sodic soils that can no longer support crops, high levels of fertilizers and pesticides in our water, human foods with declining nutrient qualities, and the creation of an expanding “dead zone” in the Gulf of Mexico, a result of things we are flushing down the Mississippi River, mostly attributable to runoff from farmland.



But the good news, if there is any, according to Schmidt, is that we now know how to fix these problems. The solution lies with the adoption of “regenerative agricultural” techniques. Our soils today in many parts of the state are largely dead, according to Schmidt, due to generations of abusive soil practices like intensive tillage, poor crop rotation patterns and the widespread use of agricultural chemicals. “In our zeal to control agricultural pests and maximize yields, we have inadvertently killed our soils and the ability of soil organisms to support

agriculture”, says Schmidt. The concepts of regenerative agriculture are not new but are becoming much more common today as farmers and ranchers face mounting difficulties in maintaining profitable and sustainable operations. The main idea is to restore the abundant and diverse life forms that exist in healthy soils, and to use those resources to benefit agricultural production. “Mimic mother nature. Diversity is good and healthy”, Schmidt told his audience. One example he gave is that every time a farmer sprays an insecticide to kill a harmful insect, he is also killing dozens of species of beneficial insects. The producer may be better off finding ways to support populations of beneficial insects, which may then eliminate the need to buy insecticides. Reducing input costs is one of the main benefits of adopting regenerative agricultural practices, according to Schmidt.“

But what does all that mean for wildlife”, was a question asked by a member of the audience, which seemed natural considering the audience was the Brookings Wildlife Federation. “Healthy wildlife populations in the soil will translate to healthy wildlife populations above ground”, was Schmidt’s prompt reply. He went on to explain, in detail, the numerous and complex connections between healthy soil and healthy wildlife populations. One example is that many wildlife species depend directly on healthy and abundant insect populations. Pheasant chicks eat nothing but insects. For ducks it varies a little between species, but ducklings also depend very heavily on aquatic insects, particularly early in life. No insects results in *no* reproduction. Another example is water quality. A recent study of drain tile impacts indicates that pollutants that enter wetlands through

drain tile detrimentally impact aquatic invertebrates. Through the adoption of regenerative agricultural practices, the ability of soil to absorb and retain water increases dramatically, which will reduce the amount of agricultural chemicals that run off into our wetlands, streams and lakes. A third example is nesting cover. Without adequate nesting cover, species like ducks and pheasants cannot successfully reproduce. Regenerative agricultural practices promote no-till systems, cover crops, and diverse crop rotations that include small grains like winter wheat. These practices offer the potential to provide upland nesting cover to species like ducks and pheasants.

Ducks Unlimited is excited about the prospects of regenerative agriculture taking root in South Dakota and expanding across this diverse and important landscape. Probably one of the most important benefits of this initiative is that it also makes sense financially. “We’ve known from the beginning that we can’t simply promote practices that cost producer’s money out of their pocket”, explained Schmidt. “The Prairie Pothole Region is a huge landscape, and nobody has enough money to simply pay landowners to conserve soil, water and wildlife, he added.



A soybean field (top) has been planted into a standing green cover crop that was later terminated. (bottom) A duck nest in a soybean field in 2018.

South Dakota

“Regenerative agriculture pays for itself”, according to Schmidt. He should know. His family adopted the principles on the family farm in Minnesota several years ago. Today, they spend considerably less on input costs, but have maintained crop yields and in some instances have yields that surpass yields on adjacent lands. “It works”, he says confidently. It is that confidence that has DU excited about the future of regenerative agriculture.

Longtime DU Supporters Offer Pledge of Financial Support & Legacy Gift



Bruce and Annie Knowlan have enjoyed the outdoors all their lives. Growing up in Minnesota, they frequented the lakes in the northern part of the state to enjoy the summers, and each autumn they traveled to the South Dakota prairies to enjoy the bounty of the fall migration. They so appreciated the prairie pothole region, they decided to purchase their own a piece of paradise. Many fall seasons and longtime relationships have been enjoyed since they purchased the land. They restored both upland and wetland habitats and enrolled those acres into long term conservation programs. Bruce and Anne have shared their land with many family members and outdoor enthusiasts and now they plan to leave this treasured place to Ducks Unlimited to ensure it will be protected and passed on to future generations.

In 2017, Bruce attended a DU “Evening of Conservation” event in Aberdeen, SD, where he discovered the difference DU is making on the landscape and how he can become a part of DU conservation mission. Bruce and Annie have made two major donor gifts since that event, and now intend to give their land in South Dakota to DU through their estate plans.

Ducks Unlimited would like to say thank you to the following South Dakota Major Donors that signed \$450,000 in new pledges to support DU’s conservation programs in 2018.

Donor Upgrades

Presidents Council - James C. and Edward Spies, John & Cheryl Dale, Matt Fenske, Clint Johnson, Tom & Kris Reaves, Jeffrey J. Scherschligt

Diamond Heritage - Don Aarstad, Brian & Karen Pellish

Heritage Sponsor - Ed Fricke, Robert & Rosemary Berg, Bill & Christy Marketon

Diamond Sponsor in Perpetuity - Jerry & Christine Moench

Sponsor in Perpetuity - Robert & Melissa Hatcher, Kevin D. Fuerst

Diamond Life - Spencer & Linda Vaa, Bruce & Mary Ann Knowlan, J. Michael & Andrea Bacharach, Joe & Kathy Carmody, Bryan & Shelly Hammer, Jeffrey Malone, Tommy & Luann Reynolds, Joel & Shauna Kemnitz, Donald & Brenda DeHaan, Michael C. Powers, Jim & Lori Redlinger

Grand Slam DUC/DUMAC - Terry & Lynda Boxdorfer

Life Sponsors

Monty D. Bechtold, Mr. and Mrs. Gale Beisch, Matt Cronin, Randal & Barbara Cichosz, Ben Dempsey, John & Cindy Dougherty, John Forman, Stephen & Brenda Foster, Rick & Peggy Salchert, Drew & Carol Skinner, Herb & Sandra Wiswall, Michael & Erica Young, Brad & Angie Reinke, Al & Elaine Vanderlaan, Tom Mebius,

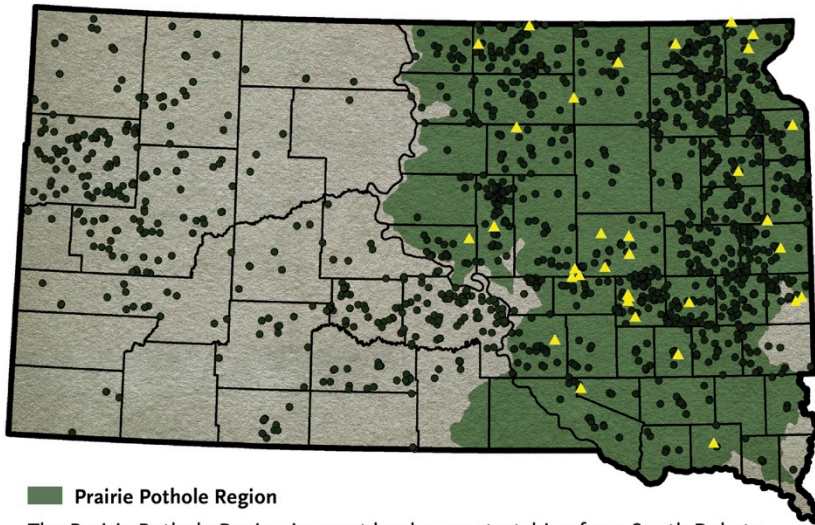
Feather Society

Anonymous

ducks unlimited
SD PROJECTS
1984-2017

- Completed projects
- ▲ 2017 Completed projects

Note: Project points may represent more than one project.



■ Prairie Pothole Region

The Prairie Pothole Region is a vast landscape stretching from South Dakota to the prairies of Canada and contain millions of small wetlands that support the most important waterfowl breeding habitat in North America.

STATE CONTACTS

For information on DU's conservation programs:

Steve Donovan, Manager of Conservation Programs, SD
sdonovan@ducks.org
(605) 633-0270

For information on becoming a volunteer:

Harold Bickner, State Chair, SD
bickner@midstatesd.net
(605) 680-0368

For information on becoming a Major Sponsor:

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

For grassroots fundraising and Greenwing Legacy information:

Don Thorpe, Senior Regional Director, SD
dthorpe@ducks.org
(605) 630-8696



GREAT PLAINS REGION

2525 River Road • Bismarck, ND 58503
701.355.3500 • 701.355.3575 (Fax)

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.