



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Small Wetlands Program

A Half Century of Conserving Prairie Habitat

Background

The vision for the Small Wetlands Program emerged in the 1940s when Waubay (*South Dakota*) National Wildlife Refuge Manager Fred Staunton began documenting significant reductions in waterfowl populations. Staunton and many others believed these reductions were the direct result of massive wetland drainage programs across our prairie landscape.

To help permanently protect habitat for North American waterfowl, the Small Wetland Program was officially created in 1958, with an amendment to the 1934 Migratory Bird Hunting Stamp Act (*commonly referred to as the Duck Stamp Act*) allowing proceeds from the sale of Federal Duck Stamps to be used to acquire waterfowl production areas.



The Prairie Pothole Region covers 300,000 square miles across the United States and Canada and is known as the duck factory of North America.

Federal Duck Stamps and Waterfowl Production Areas

All hunters and other outdoor enthusiasts benefit from Federal Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamps (*commonly referred to as Federal Duck Stamps*) and waterfowl production areas.

Waterfowl production areas (WPAs) are the on-the-ground result of your purchase of a Federal Duck Stamp.

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's Small Wetlands Program uses funds from the sale of Federal Duck Stamps to permanently protect waterfowl production areas, nearly 3 million acres so far.

Close to one million acres of the land acquired through the Small Wetlands Program is open to hunting, wildlife watching and photography, and other wildlife-dependent outdoor recreation.

WPAs also provide habitat for resident wildlife and migratory grassland birds, protect native plants, help filter groundwater, control flooding, and capture carbon from the atmosphere.

Prairie Pothole Region

The Prairie Pothole Region of North America was once the greatest expanse of grasslands and small wetlands on earth. The southern reach of the region was in central Iowa and it extended northwest through Minnesota, South Dakota, North Dakota, Montana and into Canada.

The area was covered with small wetlands, called prairie potholes, that were created when glaciers advanced and retreated over the area. The original density of small wetlands across the region was up to 83 per square mile.

Because of these small wetlands -- and the grasslands and aquatic plants and invertebrates associated with them -- the Prairie Pothole Region is an ideal nursery for waterfowl and has long been called "The Duck Factory" of North America.

Even today, with significant portions of the original wetlands and grasslands gone, the Prairie Pothole Region still produces 50 percent of the United States breeding duck populations.

The easiest thing you can do to protect Prairie Pothole Region habitat, and the birds and wildlife that need this habitat to survive, is to purchase a Federal Duck Stamp and tell your friends to purchase a Federal Duck Stamp.

National Wildlife Refuge System and Wetland Management Districts

Waterfowl production areas are a component of the National Wildlife Refuge System. The Refuge System is the only network of federal lands dedicated specifically to wildlife conservation. The Refuge System encompasses 548 national wildlife refuges and thousands of waterfowl production areas protecting more than 97 million acres of public land.

Waterfowl production areas account for 18 percent of National Wildlife Refuge System lands in the lower 48 states.

Wetland Management Districts provide oversight and management for all waterfowl production areas in a multi-county area.



More Information

For information about the Small Wetlands Program visit our website at:

<http://refuges.fws.gov/smallwetlands>