



## Introduction and General Description



**Located in the heart of the Prairie Pothole Region, North Dakota contains wetland densities exceeding 150 wetlands per square mile in many areas.**

The Prairie Pothole Region is legendary as North America's foremost producer of ducks. And North Dakota, the top duck producing State in the Nation, lies in the heart of this region. Wetland densities in North Dakota commonly reach as high as 100-150 wetlands per square mile, making it not only an important breeding area for ducks, but also a key breeding and migratory area for over 70 wetland-dependent migratory bird species.

With over 90 percent of North Dakota lands in private ownership, the North Dakota Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program is one of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's most important programs to restore and maintain habitat for migratory bird populations in the Central Flyway.

Since 1987, the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program in North

# NORTH DAKOTA

Dakota has matched Federal funds with donated private funds and North American Wetland Conservation Act grants to restore, create, and enhance wildlife habitat on more than 144,000 acres of private land in the State (equal to 225 square miles).

The Partners Program boasts projects in all 52 counties of North Dakota, in cooperation with over 2,000 farmers and ranchers, who themselves have donated over \$500,000 in direct payment and hands-on work to develop new habitat and to initiate conservation-oriented agricultural practices that benefit wildlife.

## Habitats of Special Concern

### *Coteau Prairie Ecosystem*



**Brad and Lola Sigvaldsen kneel proudly behind a blue-winged teal nest - one of the results of their 56.5-acre oxbow restoration seen in the background.**

## *Recovery*

The 6.08 million-acre Coteau Prairie Ecosystem contains many unique features that make it one of the most important areas for migratory birds in North America. Wetland densities can exceed 150 basins per square mile. The



**The Dale Brewster family and other landowners have contributed over \$500,000 to Partners for Fish and Wildlife projects since 1987.**

highest known nesting densities of mallards have been recorded within the Coteau Prairie Ecosystem. It contains nesting habitat of nearly 10 percent of the Great Plains population of federally threatened piping plover.

And the highest known densities of plains sharp-tailed grouse in North America are evidence to the vast expanses of native prairie that still exist in this area. Within the Coteau Prairie Ecosystem lies the 28,000 acre Lostwood National Wildlife Refuge, a birdwatcher's paradise that is home to Baird's sparrows, LeConte's sparrows, and Sprague's pipits.

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### ***Northern Great Plain***

This 12.28 million-acre area in western North Dakota is known for broad expanses of native pastureland bisected by hundreds of intermittent streams and several larger rivers. Over 700,000 head of cattle were raised in the Northern Great Plains in 1994. The area is considered extremely important for breeding and migrating grassland songbirds, as well as several species of



**Before: North Dakota mixed grass prairie.**

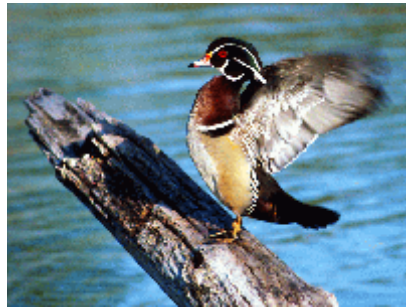


**After: The Partners Program assisted the landowner in developing a rest/rotation grazing system. Systems like this enhance wildlife habitat on private lands and afford landowners an opportunity to better manage their livestock.**

shorebirds. Pronghorn antelope, mule deer, and golden eagles are common.

### ***Chase Lake Prairie Ecosystem***

The Chase Lake Prairie Ecosystem contains some of the highest duck producing areas in the lower 48 states. Within this 4.5 million acre ecosystem, are prairie wetland complexes that exceed 100 basins per square mile. Some of the highest densities of native prairie



**Male wood duck.**

remaining in the Upper Great Plains are found here, including a roughly 20 square-mile, roadless block of prairie at its core. The area is home to North America's largest breeding colony of white pelicans and provides exceptional migratory habitat for millions of shorebirds each year. Agricultural production in the Chase Lake Ecosystem consists of a diverse mixture of grain and sunflower production and cattle production.

### **Threats**

The key ingredients to maintaining viable populations of migratory birds are large blocks of grassed nesting cover and numerous pothole wetlands. Production agriculture, the number one economic activity in North Dakota, continues to place great pressure on both. The vast majority of North Dakota farmers and ranchers readily recognize the

contribution that wildlife and habitat provide to their quality of life. It is the rare North Dakota farmhouse that does not contain at least one shotgun or fishing pole.

However, with most farmers and ranchers suffering marginal profit margins for several years due to low grain prices and unusual climatic conditions, their ability to restore and conserve wildlife habitat has taken a back seat to keeping the farm or ranch solvent. Many bankers often look closely to assure every acre is being maximized for economic return before giving annual operating loans.

The results of these bad economic times for farmers and ranchers are seen in continued conversion of native grasslands to crop production and intensive cropping practices that contribute to the degradation of prairie pothole wetlands.

The key to stemming the tide of conversion and continued pressure on wildlife habitat is public and private programs, such as the Partners Program. The program provides the technical and financial assistance necessary for farmers and ranchers to restore grasslands and wetlands that fit into their agricultural operation. The program allows for a "win-win" situation.

### **Conservation Strategies**

The primary goal of the Partners Program in North Dakota is to restore and enhance prairie

wetland complexes. This is accomplished primarily through restoration of key wetlands, establishment of new wetlands, restoring cropland to native grasses, and promoting wildlife-enhancing agricultural practices such as rotational grazing systems, no-till cropping systems, and replacement of agricultural chemicals with biological and cultural practices. The Partners Program contributes \$200-\$250 per acre for wetland restoration costs. Native grass seeding generally costs \$75 per acre.



**Projects such as building predator exclusion fences and installing nesting structures are excellent ways to involve local wildlife clubs in Partners work.**

The nature of the Northern Great Plains, including numerous watersheds, abundant grass, and low predation rates, provides North Dakota Partners with exceptional opportunities for establishment of headwater wetlands that enhance breeding and migrational habitat for numerous wildlife species.



**Successful private lands restoration depends on the landowner and the Partners Program representative agreeing on mutual goals that will benefit wildlife and the landowner's operation.**

These wetland restorations cost \$300 per acre.

The Program also partners with ranchers to redistribute cattle away from sensitive riparian (streamside) communities. Installation of fencing costs \$5,000 per mile.



**A Partners technician and landowner working out the final details in the field for a wetland restoration.**

## Partners

Natural Resources Conservation Service  
 Farm Service Agency  
 Pheasants Forever  
 Standing Rock Sioux Tribe  
 The Bush Foundation  
 Monsanto Corporation  
 Cargill Corporation  
 American Foundation for Wildlife  
 North Dakota Game and Fish Department  
 Ducks Unlimited  
 North Dakota Wetland Trust  
 Local Soil Conservation Districts  
 Bureau of Reclamation  
 Delta Waterfowl Foundation  
 The Nature Conservancy  
 National Audubon Society  
 Dakota Wildlife Trust  
 North American Wetlands Conservation Act

## Accomplishments

### **Fiscal Year 2000 Accomplishments**

- < Wetlands Restored - 244 basins/783 acres
- < Wetlands Established - 67 basins/324 acres
- < Native Grass Restoration - 11 sites/1,009 acres - 4 sites restored for bison
- < Restoration/Rotation Grazing Systems - 12 sites/7,614 acres

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## Habitat Accomplishments 1987-2000

- T Wetlands - 2,437 basins/14,252 acres
- T Upland Habitat - 843 sites/126,055 acres
- T Riparian Habitat - 44 miles
- T 129 landowner partnerships

Cost-sharing for projects is also being secured from conservation organizations, the North Dakota Game and Fish Department, NAWCA grants, U.S. Department of Agriculture programs, local wildlife clubs, and others. Landowners have contributed 10% of funding costs. Joint ventures with all private organizations and agencies have resulted in improved economic efficiency and greater wildlife production.

## Future Needs

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- T Restore/develop 23,000 wetland acres
- T Restore/enhance 230,000 grassland acres
- T Restore 57 miles of prairie streams
- T 5,750 new landowner partnerships



A new 8 acre wetland, established by the Partners Program in a cooperative effort with the Standing Rock Sioux Nation, will provide excellent shorebird habitat while at the same time serving as a water source for the Tribe's bison herd.



Cooperative efforts with local Soil Conservation Districts are building community involvement in restoration of wildlife habitat with the Partners Program.



A completed Partners Program riparian restoration on a portion of the Little Missouri River above the Theodore Roosevelt National Park.

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## CONTACT



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