



Introduction and General Description

The Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program in South Dakota uses a “no rules” philosophy to develop partnerships and programs that simultaneously promote wildlife conservation and sustainable agriculture.

Dennis and Jean Fagerland, South Dakota farmers and Partners participants, capture this spirit and note that the program “*has proven itself to work, making agriculture and wildlife compatible with one another.*”

The Partners Program IN South Dakota has utilized this philosophy to voluntarily restore, enhance, and develop tens of thousands of acres of grassland and wetland habitats throughout the State, all with full landowner support and encouragement. A common thread through every Partners project is the ability to be flexible and responsive enough to accommodate the site-specific needs and concerns of landowners. Since 1991, this approach has resulted in over 3,100 South Dakota landowners becoming valued Partners for Fish and Wildlife partners, and the number of new landowner requests for assistance continues to accelerate.

SOUTH DAKOTA

South Dakota Activities

- / Wetland restoration
- / Grassland restoration
- / Wetland development
- / Riparian restoration
- / Grassland enhancement
- / Prescribed burns

Habitats of Special



Concern

The tallgrass prairie is widely considered one of North America’s most threatened ecosystems. Less than 4 percent of this globally unique grassland remains intact. Over 100 species of butterflies, 30 species of reptiles and amphibians, 50 species of mammals, and 250 bird species are known to breed in or use the tallgrass prairies of the Dakotas.

The Partners Program has made tallgrass prairie restoration, enhancement, and protection one of its highest priorities. We recently joined with a host of local partners to initiate a 3-year, \$500,000 effort to accelerate tallgrass prairie conservation throughout northeastern South Dakota.

The primary goal of the project is to benefit both wildlife and livestock by working with ranchers to restore and enhance grasslands. Accomplishment estimates for this cooperative effort include over 7,000 acres of beneficial grazing systems, over 1,300 acres of restored grasslands, and 35 wetland developments. This project will focus on the mutual goals shared by wildlife conservation interests and family ranchers -- a shared vision of sustainable grassland management and tallgrass prairie conservation for future generations.

Threats

South Dakota was historically characterized by vast expanses of native tall-grass and mixed-grass prairie. The eastern portion of the State is interspersed with high densities of small glacially derived wetlands, making this a vital portion of the famous “Prairie Pothole” Region. In 2000, over 3 million breeding duck pairs were surveyed in eastern South Dakota.



While the ecology of South Dakota was historically defined by this unique combination of grassland and wetland resources, habitat loss has been significant and continues to change the character of this landscape. Over 30 percent of the prairie wetlands and over 40 percent of the State's native prairie have been lost.

In particular, native prairie loss continues to be a



Native prairie

resource concern with over 450,000 acres of native prairie lost to other uses since just 1987. The recent advent of trans-genetic crop varieties appears to be a primary factor in moving crop production westward into formerly secure grasslands. Once native prairie is lost, we currently do not have the ability or understanding to fully restore these unique systems. Native prairies are very diverse and complex ecological systems that developed over thousands of years and consistently host over 100 native plant species and a host of uniquely adapted invertebrate assemblages.

Conservation Strategies

The primary conservation strategy of the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program in South Dakota is to work with local partner groups and landowners to foster actions that jointly further landscape conservation and sustainable agriculture. The cornerstone of this philosophy is based on a valuable partnership with the South Dakota Association of Conservation Districts and their member county Conservation Districts. This partnership has resulted in hundreds of jointly sponsored habitat projects and is a shining example of locally led conservation. County Conservation Districts have a proven conservation ethic and bring a critical degree of local knowledge and landowner support to resource issues. They serve as the local eyes and ears of the South Dakota Partners effort. Consistent with this philosophy, the Partners Program tailors projects to facilitate both resource conservation and sustainable agriculture.

For example, wetland developments often provide waterfowl production, watershed restoration, and livestock water benefits, all on the same site. Likewise, rotational grazing systems help to simultaneously enhance native prairie plant communities and livestock performance. Furthermore, native grassland restorations provide immediate benefits to all guilds of ground nesting birds and are also greatly valued by ranchers as premium livestock grazing land.



Meetings with private landowners are informal and often held on the hood of the pickup or at the kitchen table.

With the vast majority of South Dakota's land in private ownership, these types of "win-win" projects are essential to an effective ecosystem conservation effort.

The average costs for Partners habitat restoration activities are:

- < \$600/acre for wetland restoration
- < \$150/acre for native grass seeding
- < \$40/acre for grassland enhancement



Prairie stream

- < \$1,600/acre for wetland establishment

Partners

Over 3,100 South Dakota landowners
59 Conservation Districts
South Dakota Association of Conservation Districts
Lower Brule Sioux Tribe
Crow Creek Sioux Tribe
Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe
Yankton Sioux Tribe
Sisseton-Whapeton Sioux Tribe
Ducks Unlimited
Pheasants Forever
Wildlife Forever
East Dakota Water Development District
James River Water Development District
South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks Department
South Dakota Department of Agriculture
South Dakota Department of Environment and Natural Resources
USDA- Natural Resource Conservation Service
USDA- Farm Service Agency
Federal Emergency Management Agency
North Central Resource Conservation and Development Association
Environmental Protection Agency



Landowners meeting to inspect the new Sanborn County Conservation District no-till seed drill.

Accomplishments

- < 3,187 landowner projects
- < 14,563 wetland acres restored
- < 164,165 grassland acres restored

Future Needs

- Restore or develop 20,000 wetland acres
- Restore or enhance 200,000 grassland acres
- Restore 50 miles of prairie streams
- Establish new partnerships with 5,000 landowners



Site before wetland development and grassland restoration.



Site after wetland development and grassland restoration.

CONTACT



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