



# MONTANA

great plains region • state conservation report  
2016



**Ducks Unlimited set a record in Montana in fiscal year 2016 for conservation on 28,135 acres and technical assistance on 2,960 acres. During the past three years, DU and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) identified and funded grassland and wetland easements in important waterfowl breeding areas. In FY16, eight easements totaling 7,202 acres were secured.**

The Revolving Habitat Program (RHP) is progressing along the Hi-Line. Ducks Unlimited purchased the 1,215 acre Schurr Ranch in March 2016 and is developing protection, restoration and grazing plans for the property. True to the RHP commitment to sell lands to local ranchers once conservation actions are complete, in December 2015 DU sold the 3,000 acre Anderson Cottonwood parcel to the Anderson family.

DU and Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks completed a perpetual easement on the Pintail Flat property in Phillips County, which will protect wildlife habitat and ensure permanent public access for hunting and other recreation. DU continues to partner with the FWS Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program and local ranchers to improve RHP lands, restoring wetland basins and installing infrastructure to improve range

conditions for wildlife and livestock. DU leases all RHP lands for managed grazing and enrolls these properties in the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Block Management Program to provide hunting access.

Ducks Unlimited and the Partners for Fish and Wildlife program restored more than 1,100 acres on private lands throughout the state.

DU's partnership with Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) entered its fifth year of delivering habitat protection and restoration projects through U.S. Department of Agriculture programs. This year the partnership secured 17,712 acres of permanent and term protection agreements and provided more than 1,160 acres of technical assistance on private lands across Montana.

## PINTAIL FLAT, PHILLIPS COUNTY

Montana's Hi-line is cowboy country, where stock trailers outnumber SUVs at local cafes. Part of the Prairie Pothole Region, north-eastern Montana boasts some of the highest wetland densities and lowest human population densities.

Montana is the country's third largest waterfowl producer, so Ducks Unlimited is concerned about escalating grassland conversion. DU is working with landowners to protect the area's best habitat while

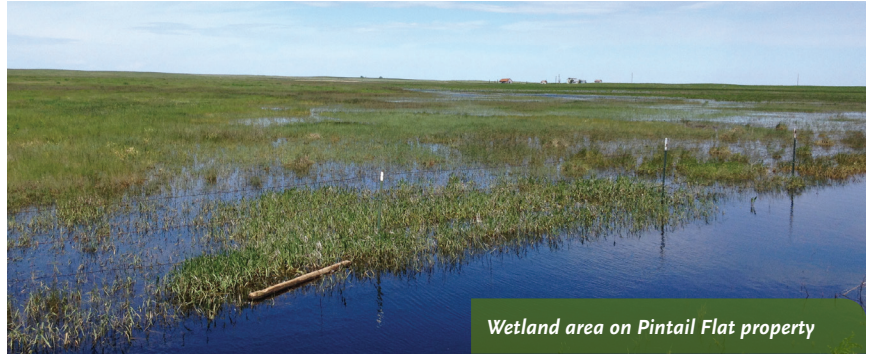
maintaining its ranching heritage. DU's Revolving Habitat Program (RHP) is helping protect land at risk of conversion. With RHP, Ducks Unlimited purchases land, restores and permanently protects it, then sells it to a conservation buyer, typically a local rancher.

Using RHP, Ducks Unlimited will protect the 1,760-acre Pintail Flat property in Phillips County. DU is working with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks to ensure perpetual



grassland management and public access for hunting. DU will sell the property to a local rancher, honoring traditional land uses.

The parcel, dominated by grassland and seasonal wetlands, is next to waterfowl production areas, refuges and major wetland complexes. Nesting waterfowl, especially northern pintails, are attracted to the seasonal wetlands on this property.



## DU IMPROVING WATER QUALITY AND HABITAT AT BENTON LAKE NWR

Staff members at the Benton Lake National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) are concerned about the refuge’s increased levels of selenium, a naturally occurring substance that can be toxic. In addition to water challenges, the Great Falls area NWR wanted to improve the quality and quantity of its habitat.

Ducks Unlimited and partners restored 2,194 acres of wetland habitat on the wildlife refuge. In the second phase of the project, DU installed a new water-control structure to help the Benton NWR staff manage water levels. The water-control structure contains a 36-inch reinforced concrete pipe with a concrete headwall and stopping logs.

"Our partnership with DU and Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MFWP) has been extremely beneficial for the refuge. The two structures we installed gave us water management capabilities, essential to our selenium remediation and water availability challenges," said project leader Rob Bundy of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS).

The project was funded by a \$75,000 North American Wetlands Conservation Act grant, which DU and partners matched. Partners included the FWS, MFWP, Pheasants Forever, and the North American Wetland Conservation Council.

Benton Lake NWR is part of a 163,304-acre national wildlife refuge complex. It encompasses a diverse landscape of wetlands, mixed-grass prairie, forests, intermountain grasslands, rivers and lakes.



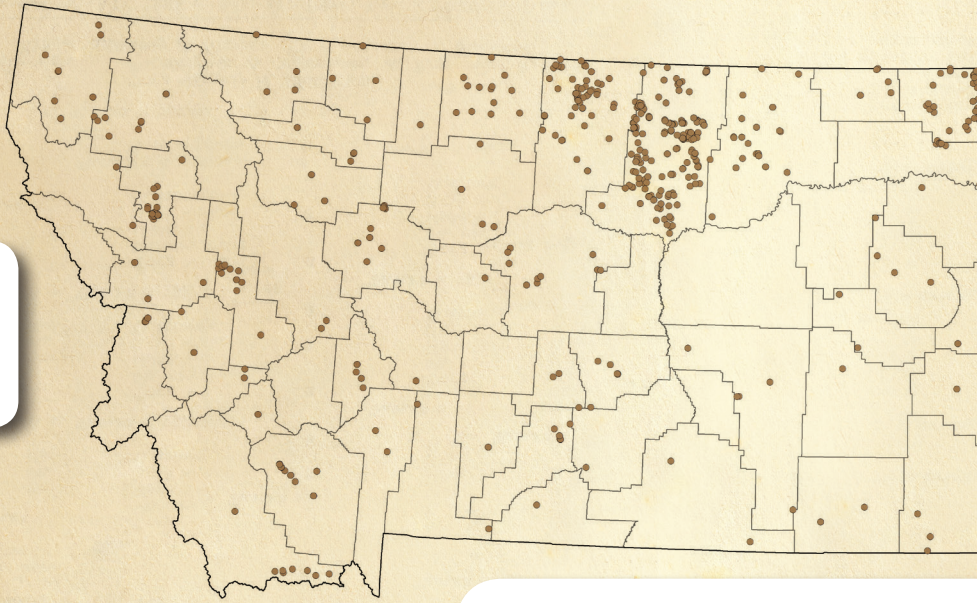
## VOLUNTEER HIGHLIGHT *STEVE CHRISTIAN*

Steve Christian and his wife, Kathy, exemplify the Ducks Unlimited family. Their four children and their spouses are major donors and involved with DU in some capacity. Their six grandchildren are all Legacy Greenwing members. Steve has been involved with DU since 1984. He has served as a state chairman for Montana and is currently an area chairman for the Medicine Lake and Colstrip chapters.

One of Steve’s most memorable experiences with DU was when he attended the Prairie Experience in Bismarck, North Dakota. As a board member for Ducks Unlimited de México (DUMAC), this event inspired him to assist in developing a similar experience in the Yucatán. ►



# MONTANA PROJECT MAP • 1984 - PRESENT



## ducks unlimited PROJECTS

● Completed

Note: Project points may represent more than one project.

## YTD accomplishments

(Based on numbers available June 2016)

77,829 Acres Protected

33,005 Acres Restored/Enhanced

72,471 Technical Assistance

“I liked the concept of bringing people to the habitat and showing them exactly how the biology and science come together to provide for waterfowl. I wanted to do something similar in Mexico,” Steve said. “We call it the Mangrove Experience and we showcase the unique habitats of the Yucatan and their importance for not only ducks but other birds like flamingos.”

Steve and his family’s contributions to DU build the foundation for the far reaching conservation impacts Ducks Unlimited has in North America.

## LANDOWNER STEWARDSHIP

Ducks Unlimited and farmer/rancher Kent Wasson have the same goal for a 3,000-acre piece of native prairie in northeastern Montana: maintaining the legacy. Wasson recently purchased the land from Ducks Unlimited.

Wasson leased the land from DU to expand his cattle herd. He also liked the location - next door to his place. “It’s not a long trail-drive for our cattle, about four miles from one end of our place to the barn,” Kent said.

This sale completes the circle for DU’s Revolving Habitat Program. Wasson wants the ranch to stay in good shape to pass on to his grandkids. Ducks Unlimited wants the land’s grass and wetlands to stay intact to maintain Montana’s legacy as the third largest waterfowl producer in the United States.

Wasson believes in treating the land well, including using farmland for residual grazing when their native grass isn’t ready for the herd.

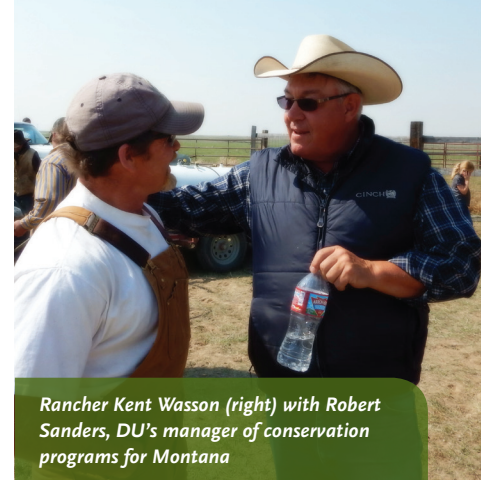
“We don’t take our cattle on the grass until it’s ready. We don’t abuse it,” he said. “I have a couple of grandkids who are going to be on the land someday and I want them to learn the lesson that we leave the land in better shape than we got it.”

Robert Sanders, DU’s manager of conservation programs for Montana, says Kent has a deep understanding of and appreciation for the land.

▼  
“As a farmer and a rancher he understands some land is best suited for farming and other areas are best suited for grazing,” Sanders said.

During DU’s ownership and with the help of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program, the land was enhanced with cattle watering systems and cross fencing. The Wassons did a lot of the work to install the equipment and paid 25 percent of the cost.

“It will help us spread the ranch out and it showed how a government agency can work with producers and accomplish good things for both sides,” Kent said.



Rancher Kent Wasson (right) with Robert Sanders, DU’s manager of conservation programs for Montana



The greatest gifts Ducks Unlimited supporters can leave for the next generation are healthy waterfowl populations and a conservation legacy. Join us in our mission to create wetlands sufficient to fill the skies today, tomorrow, and forever by enrolling a Greenwing Legacy today.



### UNIQUE ENROLLMENT OPPORTUNITIES GET YOUR FAMILY NAME(S) BRONZED\*

#### YOUTH

Enroll a Greenwing during our Rescue Our Wetland campaign (2012-2018) and they will automatically get their name listed on a plaque mounted on a bench.

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- Become a Life (Major) Sponsor
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Interested? Please contact:

Silas Counts, Greenwing Chair, MT  
(406) 679-0755

Linda Daugherty, MT DU State Campaign Chair  
(406) 362-4102

Chris Hildebrandt, Dir. of Development, MT  
(406) 203-2503

\*This special dedication is planned for 2019 at Benton Lake National Wildlife Refuge near Great Falls, MT.

#### For information on DU’s conservation programs:

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#### For information on event fundraising:

Kathy Christian - State Chairman, MT  
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#### For information on becoming a Major Sponsor:

Chris Hildebrandt  
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Ducks Unlimited conserves, restores,  
and manages wetlands and associated habitats  
for North America’s waterfowl. These habitats  
also benefit other wildlife and people.



**GREAT PLAINS  
REGION**

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