



NORTH DAKOTA

great plains region • state conservation report

2016

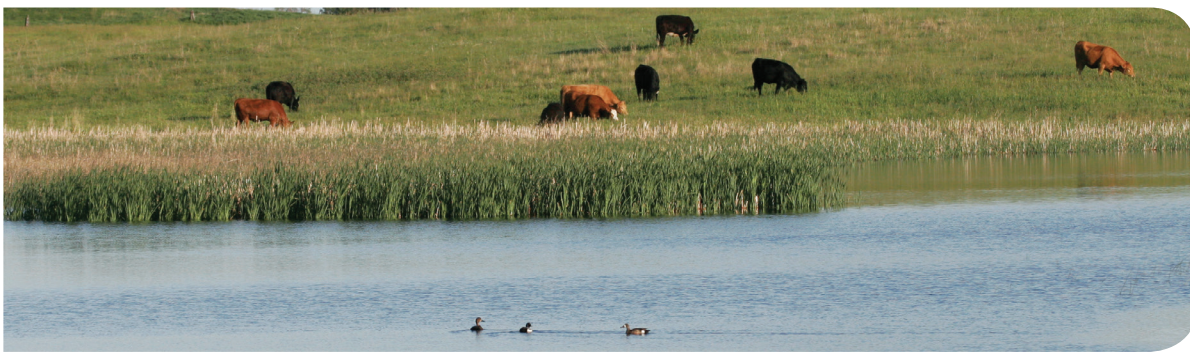
*I*t was a banner year for wetland and grassland protection in the Prairie Pothole Region of North Dakota. Ducks Unlimited's partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) to establish conservation easements is the primary tool used to protect habitat and ensure wetlands and grasslands remain on the landscape. The easement program provides landowners the ability to permanently protect habitat, be compensated and maintain operations on their land. In 2015, DU and FWS perpetually protected 26,417 acres of grasslands and 13,846 of wetlands in our high priority landscape.

DU conservation specialists throughout the state help landowners with technical assistance, evaluating options, developing conservation plans and working through enrollment paperwork. Short-term conservation programs like the USDA Conservation Reserve Program and Outdoor Heritage Fund grant opportunities are among the options for North Dakota producers. DU conservation specialists worked with 406 producers in eight counties delivering 4,346 acres of USDA conservation programs.

This past summer, through a partnership with the University of North Dakota, the DU science team provided undergraduate biology students, Nick Conrad and John Palarski, the opportunity to earn academic credit with a summer research project at DU's Coteau Ranch. The students studied nest attendance and defense in blue-winged teal using video surveillance at individual nests. They gathered thousands of hours of footage that they are now analyzing. At the annual meeting of The Wildlife Society the students won second place presenting their research in the student poster competition.

With the continued support of the grassroots movement in North Dakota, and the shared desire of staff and major supporters to conserve what are arguably the most important habitats on the continent for waterfowl, 2016 will exhibit that passion. DU strives to improve and provide habitats for Mid-continent populations of ducks and geese enjoyed by those in North Dakota and states below.

DU'S CARBON OFFSET PROGRAM AWARDED TWO USDA GRANTS



Ducks Unlimited received two Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to further carbon market development in the Prairie Pothole Region (PPR). One of

▼
the grants will advance the existing grassland carbon offset market, leveraging DU's conservation expertise and improving market access. The second CIG will investigate the science and market potential for carbon offsets from wetland conservation in the Northern Great Plains. Both efforts focus on incentivizing waterfowl habitat conservation and providing financial benefits to private landowners.

"DU is committed to furthering innovative, market-based solutions to maintain working grasslands that are economically and ecologically valuable. It is great to see this investment from the USDA as we continue to work towards a viable marketplace for grassland-based producers," said Billy Gascoigne, DU's carbon program lead.

DU COMPLETES OUTDOOR HERITAGE FUND PROJECT IN ALKALI CREEK WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA

Ducks Unlimited engineers recently completed repairs on a 58-acre wetland impoundment on the Alkali Creek Wildlife Management Area, near Bowman, North Dakota. This project was funded by the N.D. Outdoor Heritage Fund which was established by the legislature using oil production tax revenue. The property is managed by the North Dakota Game and Fish Department (NDGFD).

"We originally developed the impoundment to provide habitat for waterfowl breeding pairs and broods," said DU Senior Regional Biologist Rick Warhurst. "But a whole variety of wetland life benefit. Water birds, such as great blue herons and egrets, and marsh birds, like American bitterns, willets and marbled godwits, to name a few."

DU partnered with NDGFD for the repairs, which were funded by a grant from the Outdoor Heritage Fund.

A dam and water control structure were originally constructed in 1994 to create

Ducks Unlimited received its first CIG grant in 2011 to initiate the carbon credit trading program in the PPR of the Dakotas. The program protects grasslands that are at risk of conversion to row-crop production, which releases belowground carbon reserves. With this grant DU developed an industry-approved accounting method and contract with nearly 50 different landowners.

"We are working with landowners who are predominately ranchers facing economic pressures to plow grasslands for more lucrative field commodities," Gascoigne said.

Last fall, DU developed nearly 40,000 carbon credits from at-risk grasslands, which were the first of their kind and resulted in a monumental sale to Chevrolet.



Construction crews excavate Alkali Creek inlet and install new slotted inlet pipe.

the wetland. Since then, waves eroded a small portion of the bank and sediment clogged the water control structure's inlet pipe. DU engineers added rock riprap to the eroded portion of the embankment and installed a new, slotted inlet pipe enveloped in engineered rock gradations to inhibit future clogging.

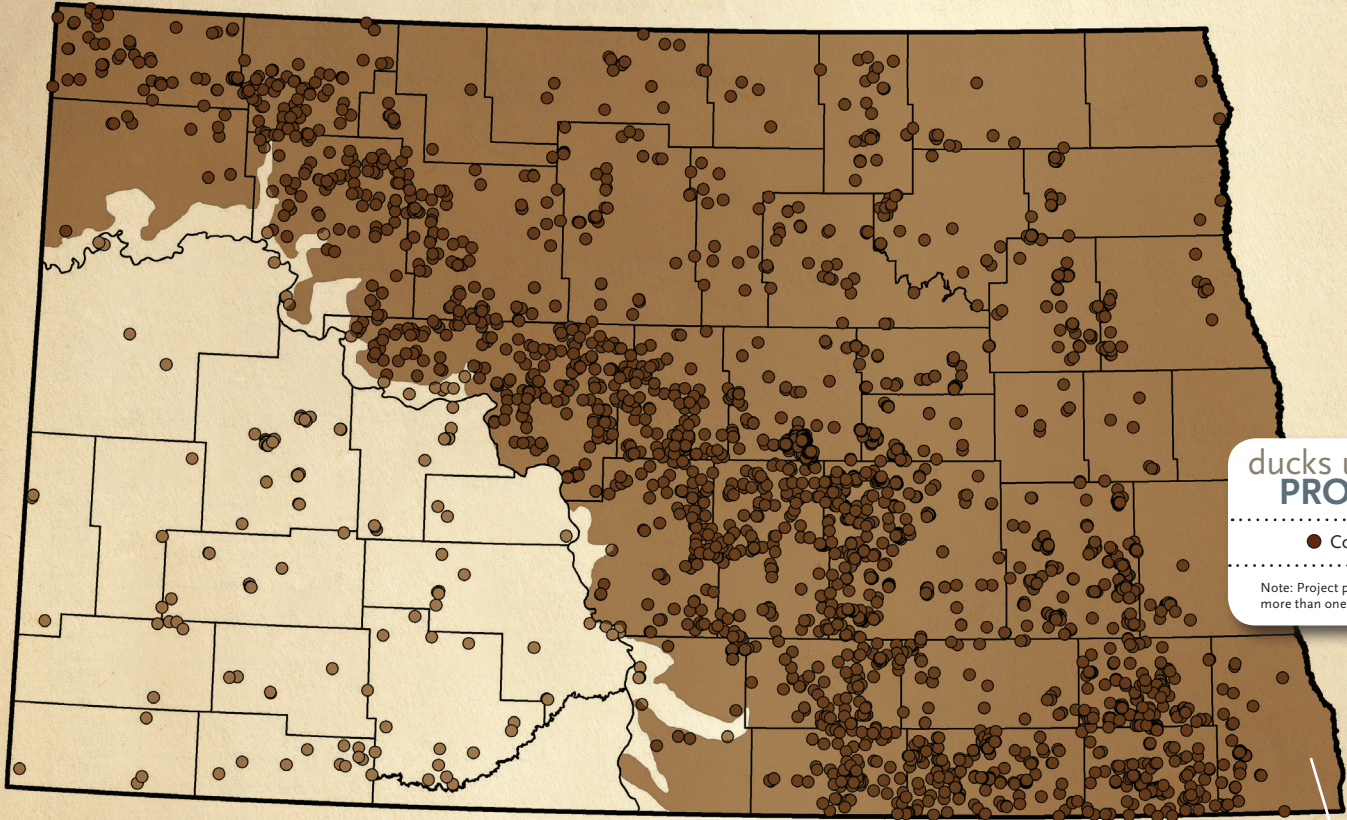
Warhurst expects the repairs to last many years.

Warhurst Retires

Senior Biologist Rick Warhurst is retiring from Ducks Unlimited after a 30 year career in the Great Plains. Warhurst began with DU in 1985 as the Great Plains' first regional biologist. Ducks Unlimited had opened the Great Plains Regional Office the year before to develop a significant presence on the Northern Great Plains waterfowl breeding grounds. Warhurst will retire on Dec. 31, 2015.

"Our work to put habitat on the land will be vital in the future because when it comes to civilization progress versus natural resources, our natural

PROJECT MAP • 1984-2015



ducks unlimited
PROJECTS

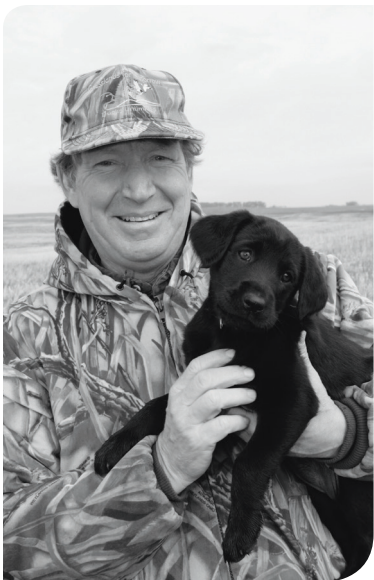
● Completed

Note: Project points may represent more than one project.

2015
accomplishments

224 Projects
68,322 Acres Conserved
\$5,811,803 Invested

Prairie Pothole Region



▼ resources often come second,” he said. “Having wild places is important and we need to continue to influence people and implement conservation practices as human populations grow and put additional pressure on the landscape.”

Rick was originally assigned to work in Minnesota and South Dakota and one of his first assignments was with the Midcontinent Mallard Project in west-central Minnesota. This was a private lands program where DU worked with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) to restore drained wetlands and convert former cropland to grassland nesting cover. This program became the predecessor for the FWS Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program.

Rick always wanted to work with ducks and geese. His parents influenced his passion for the outdoors and natural resources when he was young and he always appreciated the opportunity to work with DU.

Rick will not be retiring completely from the conservation business. He will be working part time with the North Dakota Natural Resources Trust as a staff member to the Central Flyway representative on the North American Wetlands Conservation Council. Reviewing North American Wetlands Conservation Act grant proposals and making funding recommendations to the council representative will be one of his duties.

DU JOINS PARTNERS TO HOST FIRST ANNUAL ND LEGISLATIVE FUN SHOOT



North Dakota lawmakers and conservationists gathered this past fall at Capital City Sporting Clays near Bismarck to discuss sportsmen topics and enjoy an evening of fellowship and clay target shooting. Ducks Unlimited and a number of other conservation groups co-sponsored the first annual Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation Legislative Fun Shoot. ND's bipartisan sportsmen's caucus co-chairs were instrumental in helping organize the event, including Rep. Todd Porter (R-Mandan), Rep. Corey Mock (D-Grand Forks), Sen. Kelly Armstrong (R-Dickinson) and Sen. Phil Murphy (D-Portland).

"Getting all of these people gathered was empowering for me because it displayed the unity which makes progress possible," said Senator Phil

Murphy of Portland, North Dakota. "This type of bonding will only serve us to better work together to keep North Dakota a premier destination for the hunters and anglers that help fund our efforts through their licenses and purchases."

Attendees were able to discuss important wildlife habitat conservation, sportsmen's access and shooting sports topics. Fifteen state legislative leaders attended the event. Mike Jensen, outdoor promotion manager for the state tourism department, and Director Terry Steinwand and Deputy Director Scott Peterson of the North Dakota Game and Fish Department also attended.

Scheels All-Sports was a primary event sponsor, along with DU, Pheasants Forever, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Mule Deer Foundation, National Wild Turkey Foundation, Federal Ammunition, Delta Waterfowl and the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation. Supporters hope to grow and make this an annual event.

GREAT RESPONSE TO STUDENT RESEARCH PARTNERSHIP

Ducks Unlimited has partnered with the University of North Dakota (UND) to start a Student Research Internship Program. Two undergraduate students, Nick Conrad and John Palarski, were sponsored by UND professor Dr. Susan Ellis-Felege and used video surveillance to examine nest attendance and defense by blue-winged teal at DU's Coteau Ranch last summer.

With help from DU's research staff, John and Nick located blue-winged teal nests and installed

miniature 24-hour infrared surveillance cameras on 33 nests. They collected and analyzed thousands of hours of footage. Along the way, they developed field techniques, collaborated with DU biologists and honed study design skills.

The students' also incorporated their video surveillance data into a large UND citizen science project created by Dr. Susan Ellis-Felege and Dr. Travis Desell, called Wildlife@Home. Online participants, dubbed citizen

scientists, have the opportunity to participate in analyzing the waterfowl nesting video footage collected by the UND students, and to pose questions about waterfowl ecology to DU scientists. Nearly 20,000 people visited the DU research page while nearly 10,000 people viewed videos of nesting ducks.

"We are looking forward to continuing this program in 2016 with new undergraduate students," said Kaylan Carrlson, DU manager of conservation planning.



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**

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