



SOUTH DAKOTA

great plains region • state conservation report

2016

Ducks Unlimited completed several conservation objectives in South Dakota in 2015. The partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service protected thousands of acres of wetlands and grasslands with voluntary conservation easements. Through the Revolving Habitat Program (RHP), DU acquired five properties totaling 907 acres. An additional two properties totaling 960 acres, were conserved, protected and sold to conservation buyers through RHP with proceeds from the sales directed back into the program. In September, the North American Wetlands Conservation Council approved DU's Eastern South Dakota Wetlands Phase I proposal, providing DU with \$1.6 million for wetland conservation.



DU faces challenges and opportunities in 2016. Truckloads of drain tile departing a Brookings manufacturing plant are a constant reminder that wetland drainage continues impacting wetlands important to breeding waterfowl. Despite low commodity prices, the conversion of grassland to cropland continues in the Prairie Pothole Region. Anyone who has fished in eastern South Dakota lakes in recent years has seen firsthand the algae problems that are directly linked to runoff from agricultural lands.

The health of our natural resources, including wildlife habitat and water quality, is in question. While this is a growing challenge for DU and other conservation groups, it also provides opportunity. During 2015, DU submitted two proposals to the U.S.

Department of Agriculture through the Regional Conservation Partnership Program. If these proposals are approved, DU will have funds available to work with farmers and ranchers on a variety of conservation programs that will benefit sustainable agricultural production and wildlife. One example is the use of cover crops as part of a corn and soybean rotation. Cover crops can significantly improve soil health, provide wildlife habitat and improve water quality.

PUBLIC POLICY

In January, the South Dakota legislature challenged perpetual conservation easements with a proposed bill that would have eliminated this option for private landowners. Landowners and conservation groups testified in opposition of the bill and it was killed in committee.

As part of South Dakota Governor Dennis Daugaard's Pheasant Initiative, the legislature created the Habitat Conservation Fund and appropriated \$350,000 to the fund to be matched with private dollars. In December, the Habitat Conservation Fund Board announced eight project proposals submitted by Ducks Unlimited were approved totaling more than \$317,000.



DU RESTORING VITAL HABITAT IN SOUTH DAKOTA

Ducks Unlimited is restoring three important waterfowl habitat properties in Sanborn County. These include the 524-acre Summit Ag Fund property near Woonsocket and the Bennett property, 160 acres, and Ettswold property, 130 acres, both near Letcher. These properties are in the James River Lowlands, a landscape dotted with numerous shallow wetlands.

“Sanborn County is very important to breeding waterfowl. We hope improving the habitat on these properties will lead to further opportunities to restore and protect other important waterfowl habitat in this area,” said Steve Donovan, DU’s South Dakota manager of conservation programs.

During wet years, this landscape attracts large numbers of breeding waterfowl. The James River Lowlands is in the heart of the Prairie Pothole Region (PPR), some of the most important waterfowl-breeding habitat in North America.

The Summit Ag Fund property contains more than 50 small, seasonal wetlands, most of which have been drained. Ducks Unlimited will restore the wetlands and native prairie. Through its Revolving Lands Program, DU will protect the habitat with an easement and sell the properties at public auction.

Projects like these help Ducks Unlimited protect important waterfowl-breeding habitat in the PPR.



DU PARTNERS WITH CLIMATE ADAPTATION FUND TO RESTORE HABITAT

Ducks Unlimited received a \$174,900 grant from the Climate Adaptation Fund to restore waterfowl habitat in South Dakota. The Wildlife Conservation Society awards this grant to projects that help wildlife and the ecosystems they depend on adapt to climate change. The presence of shallow wetland habitat throughout the Prairie Pothole Region (PPR) is dependent on precipitation and temperature. Changes in climate patterns can alter wetland productivity and geographic abundance, potentially reducing breeding habitat availability for wetland-dependent species like waterfowl.

“Research has shown that reducing non-climatic stressors on the environment is one of the best ways to provide a pathway for species to adapt to changes in climate,” said Bruce Toay, DU regional biologist. “With this grant DU will restore targeted wetland and grassland habitats, to connect existing intact areas and mitigate potential climate change impacts to breeding ducks on a landscape level in the PPR.”

Proposed projects include restoration of 62 drained wetlands and restoration of 647 acres of grassland habitat. These projects are in targeted areas across eastern South Dakota adjacent to intact and protected habitats, maximizing the potential to attract the highest densities of breeding waterfowl and other migratory birds.

More information on the Climate Adaptation Fund is available at:
www.wcsnorthamerica.org/Climate-Adaptation-Fund

► STATE CONTACTS

For information on DU’s conservation programs:

Steve Donovan
Manager of Conservation Programs, SD
sdonovan@ducks.org • (605) 633-0270

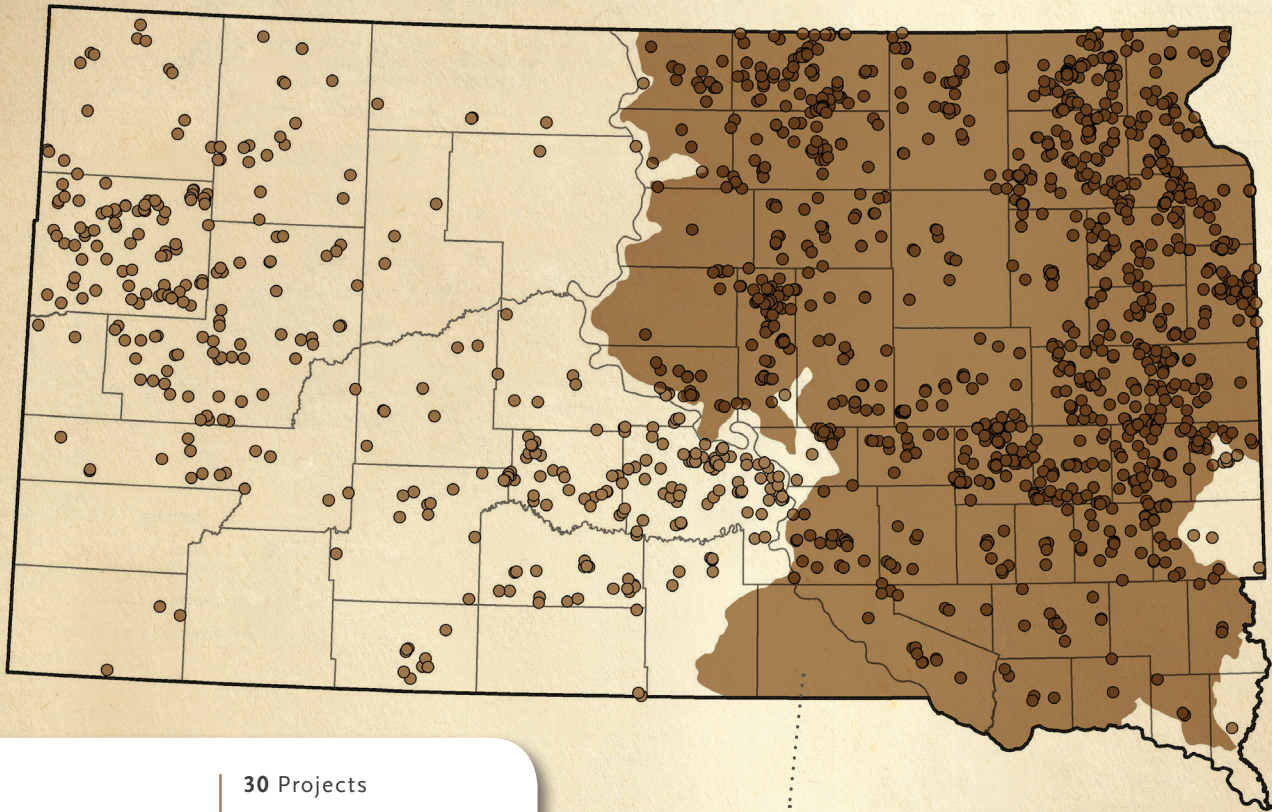
For information on event fundraising:

Harold Bickner
State Chairman, SD
bickner@midstatesd.net • (605) 680-0368

For information on becoming a Major Sponsor:

Terry Kostinec
Director of Development, SD
tkostinec@ducks.org • (320) 760-6176

PROJECT MAP • 1984-2015



2015 accomplishments

30 Projects
31,683 Acres Conserved
\$4,209,165 Invested

Prairie Pothole Region

The Prairie Pothole Region (PPR) is a lush ecosystem of wetlands and grasslands and provides highly productive waterfowl nesting and breeding habitat.

ducks unlimited PROJECTS

● Completed

Note: Project points may represent more than one project.



LONG TIME DU SUPPORTERS RENEW THEIR SUPPORT FOR RESCUE OUR WETLANDS

Terry Boxdorfer (left) of Hartford and Brad Jensen of Watertown upgraded their support of DU to Diamond Sponsor in Perpetuity. As major donors, they support the South Dakota Preserve Our Prairies Initiative that focuses on the prairie waterfowl breeding landscape. Terry became a DU volunteer in Hartford in the mid-70s and Brad a volunteer in Aberdeen a few years later.

"I am excited my contributions will be matched with public grant dollars, doubling my investment in conservation work," said Brad. "I just retired as a Regional Director of Fundraising for DU, but my personal role in conservation will continue as a volunteer and major donor."

DU AND PARTNERS SECURE NAWCA GRANT TO RESTORE WETLANDS

The Migratory Bird Conservation Commission recently approved a \$1.6 million grant to restore wetlands in eastern South Dakota through the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA). DU and its conservation partners will provide matching dollars to bring the funding total to \$3.3 million.

“Not only will these projects improve habitat for ducks and other wildlife, but they will also help improve water quality in places like the Big Sioux River, an important issue in eastern South Dakota,” said Steve Donovan, DU manager of conservation for South Dakota.

As part of this grant, DU will restore a pump station and levee on the Renziehausen Slough Game Production

Area (GPA) near Britton, enhancing land management capability. DU will also restore the 250-acre Lake Bdesaka marsh near Sisseton by installing a large water control structure.

DU will use the grant to protect at-risk wetlands by purchasing permanent conservation easements from willing landowners. Small, seasonal wetlands are important habitat for breeding waterfowl and DU will restore about 50 small wetlands on private land near Platte, Watertown, Veblen, Sisseton, Woonsocket and Mitchell.

Additional activities funded by this effort include restoration of wetlands on DU's Engstrom property in Clark County. This property will be sold to South Dakota

Game, Fish and Parks and is the site of a future Legacy Greenwing and major sponsor recognition cairn. A project on the Medicine Knoll Creek GPA east of Pierre and the Garden Creek wetlands project along the Missouri River south of Lake Andes are also planned.

Partners include The Nature Conservancy; James River Water Development District; South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks; U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service; Pheasants Forever chapters in Aberdeen, Sisseton and Mitchell; Izaak Walton League of America; Brown County Whitetails Unlimited; High Plains Wildlife Association; Sportsman's Club of Brown County; and the Grass Lake Conservation Club.

DU TO DEDICATE SOUTH DAKOTA PROJECT TO RESCUE OUR WETLANDS SPONSORS AND GREENWINGS

Ducks Unlimited will dedicate a Watertown-area project as part of DU's Rescue our Wetlands campaign. This is the first DU campaign that includes DU Canada and DU Mexico. The campaign focuses on the Prairie Pothole Region of the U.S. and Canada and important waterfowl migration and wintering grounds in other parts of the U.S. and Mexico. It is the most ambitious campaign in DU history with a goal of raising \$2 billion by the end of 2018.

“The Rescue Our Wetlands campaign will help DU deal with the rapidly growing threat to wetlands and grasslands that are necessary for ducks, as well as for providing clean water,” said Jeff Heidelbauer, DU regional vice president and South Dakota resident.

The South Dakota project called the Engstrom Property, is a 240-acre tract of wetlands and grasslands on the south side of Swan

Lake. DU purchased the property in 2012 as part of the Revolving Habitat Program. It is adjacent to a large Game Production Area (GPA) owned by South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks (SDGFP) and a parcel owned by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

DU will restore three small wetlands on the tract providing pair and brood habitat for breeding waterfowl. The uplands on the property will also support pheasants, deer and other wildlife.

DU will transfer ownership of the property to SDGFP, adding to the existing GPA and providing public hunting access.

“It is an ideal location to recognize Ducks Unlimited donors and partners who contribute to the Rescue Our Wetlands campaign,” Heidelbauer said.

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)