

Prairie PONDerings

Sponsored by the North Dakota Natural Resources Trust

2015 North Dakota
Natural Resources Trust

Annual Report

By Keith Trego, Executive Director, North Dakota Natural Resources Trust
Photos courtesy of USDA NRCS

After many years of staff stability in the North Dakota Natural Resources Trust (Trust), last year was one of significant change. Longtime Trust biologist and North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) staffer Karen Kreil retired at the end of June. She will be very much missed around the Trust office, both for her experience and professional acumen, but also for her warm personality, fun-loving ways, and her many contributions to the Trust team. Kreil's former responsibilities are being covered in two ways.

In June, the Trust hired Jesse Beckers as a conservation program coordinator. Beckers will handle a wide variety of natural resource work (he was profiled in the September 2015 issue of *North Dakota Water*).

Regarding the NAWCA staffing work Kreil performed, the Trust was fortunate to acquire the services of Rick Warhurst. Warhurst retired from Ducks Unlimited (DU) at the end of last year and came to work for the Trust on

a half-time basis. He has a distinguished 30-plus year career in waterfowl and wetland management work, and is profiled on page 11. Warhurst's experience and expertise will allow the Trust to continue the relationship it has had with the North Dakota Game and Fish Department for the past 10 years, providing staff support to Game and Fish Director Terry Steinwand in his role as chair of the NAWCA Council. Even though Warhurst didn't officially start his work with the Trust until this year, I include the staffing change here since it completes the full picture of the many changes that actually occurred last year.

Not only was last year a watershed year for internal changes at the Trust, it was also a year that saw worldwide economic changes that altered North Dakota's energy and agricultural industries in a dramatic way. From a recent time when both energy and farm commodity prices were at record





Overview

or near record highs – to a time, at the end of last year, when oil prices were at one-third of their former value and farm commodity prices were below break-even for all but the most efficient producers.

During the “good times” for agriculture, producers took advantage of high profits and a producer-friendly federal crop insurance system that was developed collaboratively and supported by both national agricultural and conservation interests during development of the 2014 farm bill. Land prices skyrocketed, with producers competing with each other to reinvest returns in their businesses. As the profitability of valuable crops increased, more pressure was put on native sod and tame grass, decreasing the availability of pasture and hay land. Grassland agriculture, which already receives little consideration in national agriculture policy, came under even more pressure. Retention

of existing grassland and reestablishment of grassland on fragile and less productive soils will require more attention and collaboration in coming years.

In the energy fields of western North Dakota, the boom has slacked off due to much lower oil prices. Jobs have been lost, fewer wells drilled, and some wells drilled but not completed or producing. I do not think anyone believes that energy production has gone bust as it did in the 1980s, but it is clearly a time of pulling back, cost cutting, and cash-flow challenges.

The pressure put upon North Dakota’s natural resources – our air, water, land, and wildlife – from industrial-scale energy development and intensive production agriculture – found some relief in 2015. Only time will tell if this respite is brief or prolonged. And whether the reintroduction of stark reality into the business cycle might bring with it a reflection toward better public policy that values North Dakota’s natural resources for the long



term. That would be a desirable indirect outcome of an otherwise problematic economic downturn.

In any case, the Trust and its many partners will continue to engage with the thousands of willing and enthusiastic landowners who want to implement conservation practices on their farm and ranch lands. Objective analysis of private land conservation outcomes shows that appropriate application of conservation practices on fragile and otherwise low-producing land pays rather than costs. The value accrued to society as

a whole through reduced soil erosion, enhanced water quality, and enhanced wildlife and fisheries resources, along with the money saved directly by reduced prevented plant and crop insurance payments, makes conservation a fiscal positive rather than just another government expenditure. So just maybe, the increased demand for private land conservation options among producers will result in support among policymakers for more and better funded conservation options, even in a time of fiscal austerity at the state and federal level.

Accomplishments in 2015

WETLANDS – PRESERVED, RESTORED, MANAGED, AND ENHANCED

Restored and Created	319.4 acres.....	33 producers
Wetlands Protection	204.6 acres.....	2 producers
Totals	524 acres	35 producers

ASSOCIATED WILDLIFE HABITAT

Upland Acres Protection/Management	2,098.4 acres.....	4 producers
Totals	2,098.4 acres	4 producers



It may be time to look to the 2017 legislative session to strengthen North Dakota's Outdoor Heritage Fund. And, as we begin discussions on the next farm bill, it may be time to ask the North Dakota Congressional delegation to support enhancements to conservation programs and funding, in support of its farmer and rancher constituents. That would be an outcome worthy of celebration by agriculture, conservation, and many citizens across North Dakota and the nation.

2015 Trust Sponsorships

Area IV Soil Conservation District Cooperative

- Research Farm
- Friends and Neighbor Days
- Winter Meeting

North Dakota Chapter of The Wildlife Society

- Randy Olson – Conservation Story Telling
- Annual Meeting
- Legislative Social

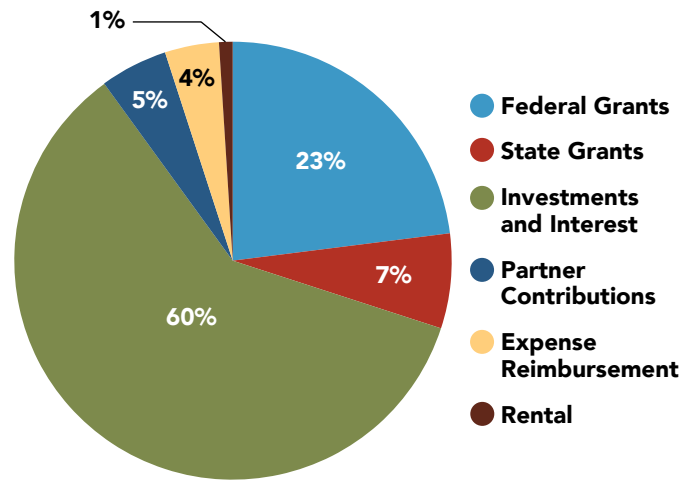
Rural Leadership North Dakota

- Tuition Sponsorships

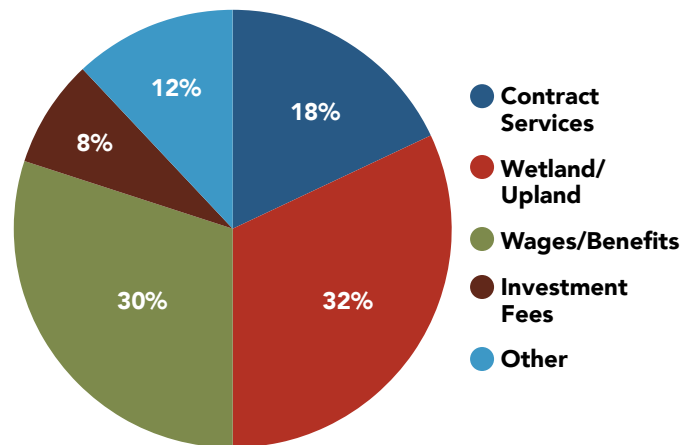
North Dakota Colonial Water Bird Project Match

- Bird Conservancy of the Rockies

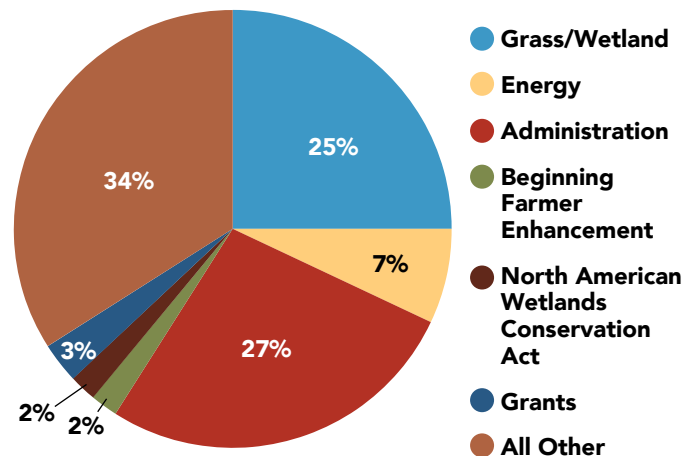
2015 Income



2015 Expenses



2015 Expenses by Project



Small Grant Report

As of March 10, 2016

14-01	North Dakota 4-H Foundation <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Completed Phase I of its project in 2015 with \$7,324 left on the grant.• Phase II will be completed this summer.	
14-02	Dakota Audubon <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Maintaining contact with grant recipient and obtaining grant status.	
14-03	Grant County Soil Conservation District <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Project complete	
14-04	U.S. National Park Service <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Representative left his position last spring and the replacement was put in place in the fall.• Contacted the new representative, and he will be doing the project this summer.	
14-05	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Junior Duck Stamp <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Project complete	
14-06	North Dakota Grazing Lands Coalition <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Will be utilizing remainder of funds this summer.	
14-07	Prairie Waters Education Center <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Project complete	
15-01	Grand Forks Soil Conservation District <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Had its big event on March 3. Sent invoice for the remaining total on March 23.	
15-02	Mouse River Loop Envirothon <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Project complete	
15-03	Sheyenne James Resource Conservation and Development Council <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Grant recipient is planning a 2016 event with cost breakdown.	
15-04	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Junior Duck Stamp <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Completed the contest in February and will be holding educational seminars around the state throughout the year.	
15-05	Rolette County Soil Conservation District <ul style="list-style-type: none">• On March 9, we received correspondence that the organization did not receive a copy of the contractual agreement.• Jesse Beckers sent a new agreement and is waiting for the return of a signed copy for Keith Trego to sign.	
15-06	Walsh County Three Rivers Soil Conservation District <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The tour will take place after June and the organization will use the awarded funds at that time.	
15-07	Badlands Conservation Alliance <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tours will be completed this year.	
15-08	Williams County Soil Conservation District <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Grant recipient is planning a 2016 event with cost breakdown.	

Summary

As of March 10, \$104,125 has been awarded in the Trust Small Grant Program, with \$44,799 allocated thus far.

Warhurst Joins Natural Resources Trust Staff



Rick Warhurst joined the staff of the North Dakota Natural Resources Trust (Trust) in January.

Warhurst came to the Trust after retiring from a 31-year career at Ducks Unlimited (DU), where he served as a biologist at the Great Plains Regional Office in Bismarck. Through his work on the delivery of waterfowl habitat on public and private lands, he worked on projects in Nebraska, Kansas, North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, Minnesota, and Iowa. Prior to working for DU, he was employed by the Kansas Fish and Game Commission as the manager of the Marais des Cygnes Wildlife Management Area in Kansas and before that, as the assistant state waterfowl biologist for the Ohio Division of Wildlife.

Warhurst says as he was nearing his retirement at DU, he learned of the retirement of Karen Kreil, whose duties at the Trust included serving as the North American Wetlands Conservation Council's staff representative for the Central Flyway Council. When Keith Trego, the Trust's executive director, approached him about whether he might be interested in taking over this position, he said he was. "I retired from DU on Dec. 31 and started at the Trust on Jan. 4. My wife said, 'That wasn't much of a retirement!' Warhurst laughs.

The Central Flyway Council is a coalition of 10 states, two Canadian provinces, and one Canadian territory that works in conjunction with the federal government to manage migratory birds and their habitats throughout the central sector of North America. This includes establishing hunting regulations, being involved with federal and state policy that impacts wildlife habitat and implementing wildlife habitat management, and development on the landscape.

Warhurst is originally from Kansas. His interest in waterfowl, especially ducks, came from his dad, who was an avid duck hunter. "He would go duck hunting on Saturday mornings during the fall and I would wait for him to return home so I could handle and play with the ducks that he brought home. When I became older, I started going hunting with him, and when I was old enough, I began duck hunting with him." This passion for waterfowl carried over into his college years, and he earned his bachelor's degree in wildlife management from Kansas State University and master's degree in zoology from Ohio State University.

Warhurst says he is enjoying his new position at the Trust. "I am looking forward to continuing to assist the Trust in addressing wetland projects, wetland issues, wetland management, and wetland education in North Dakota," he says. "The Trust attempts to coordinate and facilitate the management of natural resources with numerous partners in North Dakota, including wetlands, and bring together entities that might be at odds with one another to find compromises that provide win-win solutions for everyone. I've been involved with wetlands and waterfowl my whole career, and I'm very fortunate that I will be able to stay involved in my role as the North American Wetlands Conservation Act Council's staff representative for the Central Flyway."