

2002 ANNUAL REPORT

An Overview by Keith Trego

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There have never been more conservation opportunities in North Dakota than those existing today. Farm bill programs begun in 1985 have become increasingly more “conservation friendly,” with the 2002 farm bill containing more program options and more conservation dollars than any of its predecessors. Cost share opportunities are such that farmers and ranchers can often improve their soil and grazing lands and enhance their wildlife habitat at little or no cost to themselves. The public has clearly decided they are willing to incur these conservation costs as part of our country’s agricultural policy.

Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) incentives, a mainstay of our private land work in past years, played less importance in 2002 because there were no new sign-ups. Conversely, a window of opportunity presented itself with regard to the Wetland Reserve Program (WRP), and our activities escalated accordingly. New programs identified in the 2002 farm bill, including the Conservation Security Program (CSP), Grassland Reserve Program (GRP), and Farmable Wetland Program (FWP) will all be added to our private land options as rules are developed and appropriations provided.

Throughout 2002 the Trust continued its role as facilitator between agricultural and conservation interests. Our goal is to identify common issues, create dialogue, and resolve conflicts. Progress was made during the past year.

In 2002 the Trust also continued to advocate a “big picture” view of North Dakota’s future. The value of our scenic and productive landscape, wide open spaces, abundant fish and wildlife, and access to private land for recreational purposes are more and more discussed and appreciated. North Dakota possesses attributes, made possible by our natural resources, that either never existed or have long since been lost in most other parts of the country. The Trust and its agricultural and conservation partners advocate for recognition, appropriate development and protection of our unique natural resource values. North Dakota has natural amenities that cannot be created artificially. We possess what many Americans can only dream of, can only read about in travel, leisure, or sporting magazines. We have quality of life, quality of place, and quality of experience that is unrivaled. We should think long and hard before we propose to trade these special things for the same thing everyone else has.

The Trust provided technical advice and financial incentives to encourage land stewardship. As you will read in the remainder of this annual report, we conduct our own projects, and we grant money to others to do good resource management or resource education. We work with our friends in agriculture and conservation to improve the landscape of our state. But more than that, we try always to convey an attitude of optimism and keep an eye out for

Conservation Agriculture

by Sharon Clancy

The mission of the Conservation Agriculture project is to demonstrate that when agriculture and conservation thrive together, agricultural profitability is enhanced and conservation of natural resources and societal benefits are realized. The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation grant and EPA Wetlands Protection grants, in addition to the challenge funds

provided by the Trust, allowed the project to establish its infrastructure and proceed with whole farm plans on four farms. GIS/GPS system capabilities

are in place. Conservation improvements totaling 850.7 acres are also in place, and there are 6,713.1 acres protected with greater than 45 percent cover remaining after seeding. The evaluation and monitoring of effects of environmental products include an economic study, saline movement from a wetland into crop land, annual soils testing, habitat and wildlife changes, and sequestered carbon. Direct outreach to over 300 people and many more informed through other avenues is another accomplishment of this project.



Tom Langemo property

provision. The Trust coordinated with the governor, agricultural groups, and conservation groups to model the program to be compatible with other existing easement programs. The governor granted approval for 12 easement offers. At the end of 2002, seven easement offers had been completed.

Whole Farm and Ranch Program

by Arnold Kruse

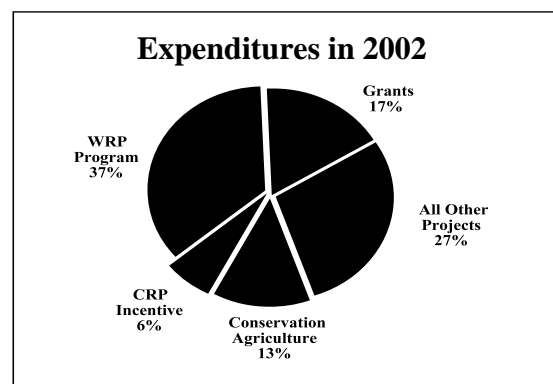
The Whole Farm and Ranch Program started in 1998 to provide better protection to wetlands and their watersheds by providing cost share incentives to producers for boundary and cross fencing, seeding, wetland restoration and creation, and no-till equipment. To date we have signed contracts with 70 producers in 18 counties. These contracts cover 34,739 acres, including 30,341 acres of upland consisting of 18,537 highly erodible acres, 18,315 acres of native prairie, and 3,171 acres of crop land seeded back to grass and legumes. There are 2,546 wetlands (4,398 acres) in the contracts, 33 of which were restored and created. To date we have spent \$280,000 for fencing, \$26,700 for grass seed, \$9,000 for wetland restoration, and \$10,000 for no-till equipment. Total cost of these contracts, when completed, will be \$446,000. In addition to contracts signed, we have provided information and technical assistance to an additional 200 producers.

Midterm Conservation Easement

Program by Terry Allbee

The Natural Resources Trust created an easement program to compliment the other land protection options currently available. The Trust had short-term, 10- to 15-year contracts, and long-term protection through ownership, but no midterm programs. The midterm conservation easement program offers 30- and 50-year easements with many options, including a buyback

Trust Dollars at Work



Wetland Reserve Program (WRP)

by Terry Allbee

2002 found the Natural Resources Trust active in participating in the US Department of Agriculture's Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) by assisting in the cost share for producers enrolled in the program, and by using the WRD to create a cost-efficient land acquisition program. In 2002 the Trust provided \$16,508 in cost share for 476 acres of native grass and 241 restored wetland acres.

Trust staff worked cooperatively with the American Foundation for Wildlife (AFW) in the acquisition of the 1,101-acre Joliet Ferry property in Walsh County. Two hundred seven (207) acres of wetlands were restored and all uplands will be planted to native grass. The project also provides much needed access to the Red River. The property has been donated to the ND Game and Fish Department.

In June the Trust purchased the Cook Slough property in Wells County. Cook Slough totals 1,476 acres. Two hundred eighty-two (282) acres of wetland restorations and 1,055 acres of native grass seeding will be completed in 2003. Enrollment into a WRP contract placed a 30-year easement on the property and compensated the Trust 75

percent of the agricultural appraised value.

The Walhalla WRP project in Pembina County, totaling 418 acres with 200+ acres of wetland restoration, will be completed in early 2003.



Cook Slough, Wells County

Grants by Linda Roeder

Each year during the Natural Resources Trust fall board of directors meeting, individual grant applications are presented to the Trust board. After review and consideration, the board may approve some or all of the requests. The following paragraphs give a status report on these grants and the work accomplished during 2002.

Delta Waterfowl Foundation, Adopt A Pothole, Missouri Coteau Region: This program continues funding farmers to protect wetlands and make their land suitable to grow ducks rather than crops. Eight farmers in three different counties re-enrolled 592 total acres. These acres included 156 wetland acres, 127 native upland acres, and 309 acres of crop land seeded to dense nesting cover (DNC).

South Central Dakota Regional Council, Nonpoint Source Pollution Best Management Practice (BMP) Team for

Sheyenne and James River Basins:

The BMP Team assists landowners with projects that improve wetlands, grasslands, or riparian habitat. The best management practices include ag waste systems, wetland creations, grassed waterways, diversions, spring developments, livestock water pipelines, and stream bank bioengineering. To date 103 landowners have been assisted with improving water quality in their watershed.

US Fish and Wildlife Service, ND Outreach Team Education Committee, 4th Grade

Habitat Notebook: Work continues on development of a curriculum and resources for fourth grade students and educators to study, understand, and become more knowledgeable about North Dakota prairie, wetlands, woodlands, and riparian areas, as well as how and why each of these areas is important to wildlife and people. The educator's guide has been written, pilot tested, and recommendations provided by teachers are being

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Beginning Farmer Program

by Terry Allbee

In 2002 the ND Natural Resources Trust created a new program that was cooperatively developed and endorsed by the ND Farm Bureau, ND Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Bank of North Dakota, ND Game and Fish Department (NDGFD), and Ducks Unlimited, Inc. The concept behind the program is that sound management of private land use for production agriculture is critical to the future of North Dakota agriculture and that young farmers and ranchers of today are the cornerstone of our agricultural heritage. To help these young farmers and ranchers get started, the Trust offers various incentives for wetland, grassland, and riparian conservation practices on private land in exchange for financial assistance that would help qualifying young farmers and ranchers acquire farm and ranch property.

Three contracts were signed in 2002 enrolling 2,255 acres in native/wetland lease and 1,239 acres in tame grass lease. Sixty-three (63) acres have been re-seeded to native grasses, four wetlands restored, 17,200 feet of boundary fence and 2,500 feet of cross fence have been erected for improved management. One thousand two hundred (1,200) acres have been opened to public access.

2002 Habitat Conservation Totals

Wetlands Habitat

• Total Producers - 456	
• Wetlands Restored/Created	1,746.0 acres
• Wetlands Managed/Protected	<u>3,396.6 acres</u>
Total	5,142.6 acres

Associated Habitat

• Total Producers - 286	
• Uplands Restored (Native/DNC)	3,440.8 acres
• Uplands Managed/Protected	20,821.5 acres
• Conservation Tillage	<u>36,964.1 acres</u>
Total	61,226.4 acres

Conservation Reserve Program

Incentives Program (CRP)

by Merle Bennett

Since 1997 the Trust has been actively promoting conservation-friendly practices of the US Department of Agriculture's Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). The Trust promotion has been in the form of incentive payments to enrolling producers to "upgrade" their CRP contracts with wetland restorations and native grass establishment. The last CRP sign-up was in 2000 and the 2002 accomplishments are based on previously signed agreements from the 15th, 16th, 18th, and 20th sign-ups.

Wetland Restoration Contracts on CRP

- 59 producers
- 16 different counties
- 268 acres of wetlands on 181 basins completed
- \$23,495 were provided to these producers

Native Grass Establishment on CRP

- 24 producers
- 11 different counties
- 1,330.3 acres of native grass seeding completed
- \$28,620 were provided to these producers

Efficiency Incentive Program

by Terry Allbee

The Trust started the original Efficiency Incentive Program (EIP) in 1998 through a grant from the Environmental Protection Agency. The program focused on water storage in the Devils Lake Basin counties. Large wetlands with adjacent cover were given priority. Shortly after the program's initial advertising, the number of contracts soon equaled the number of dollars available.

The EIP program accomplishments included a total of 33 producers with activity in every Devils Lake Basin county, restoration of 631 acres of wetlands in 168 basins, protection of an additional 638 wetlands acres, as well as 1,500 acres of upland cover.

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Grants *(continued from page 3)*

incorporated into the guide. Most of the hands-on wildlife items for use with the educator's guide (mammal hides and skulls, rubber tracks, turtle shells, bird wings, plant ID cards, posters, etc.) have been purchased.

Coalition for Conservation and Environmental Education

(C²E²), ND Envirothon: The first joint Manitoba/North Dakota Envirothon Competition was held at the International Peace Garden May 30-June 1, 2002. Three hundred fifty-three (353) students, advisors, envirothon committee members, volunteers, and guests attended. Thirty-one (31) teams participated in the three testing trails and two oral presentations for a chance at the first place traveling trophy and a trip to the International Envirothon Competition in Amherst, Massachusetts. The West Fargo High School Packers took home the traveling trophy and gold medals for first place, while Sargent Central High School placed second and Kenmare Public School Team #3 placed third.

Foster County Soil Conservation District, "Trees"

Education Series: Tom Gibson, program presenter, from Bottineau, North Dakota, continues to offer conservation education programs to North Dakota schools. His many characters, who share their stories, bring a unique and humorous quality to the educational program. Two hundred ninety-eight (298) programs were completed through February 2002 to an audience of 17,227 students.

Ducks Unlimited, Inc., Promotion of No-till Winter

Wheat: This project provides agronomic assistance to growers in no-till and winter cereal production methods in the state of North Dakota. A second objective of the project is to demonstrate that profitable and sustainable production agriculture can exist in harmony with waterfowl and wetlands.

North American Wildlife Enforcement Memorial,

Summer Wildlife Program: The North American Wildlife Enforcement Memorial and Educational Center, Inc. (USA), continues their educational programs and operation of a nature trail to offer the message of responsible resource use to visitors of the International Peace Garden. The program runs from May through August and has seen as many as 700 students in one summer. In 2002 a spotting scope was added for viewers to test their skill in finding pre-placed objects at different distances. Materials were also purchased for a floating platform that can be used for various educational purposes on Lake Udall.

No-till Drills: Six soil conservation districts and two watersheds that received funds to purchase or rent no-till cereal, planter, or seed drills reported 155 participating landowners treated 21,268.4 crop land acres and enhanced 366.1 wetland acres.



Summary of Wetland Conservation Grants:

- ***US Fish & Wildlife Service, Chase Lake V Prairie Wetlands*** restored 51 wetland basins totaling 32.9 acres. An additional 4,400 acres are in upland management.
- ***US Fish & Wildlife Service, Missouri River Wetlands*** created four wetland basins totaling 16.1 acres.
- ***US Fish & Wildlife Service, Northern Coteau III Wetlands Project*** created eight wetland basins totaling 21.8 acres and restored another 16 basins totaling 34.4 acres.
- ***Ducks Unlimited, Inc., CRP Wetland Restoration*** restored 494 wetland basins with a total of 754 acres.

EIP *(continued from page 4)*

Looking for other opportunities to continue with the success of the EIP program, the Trust partnered with the North Dakota State Water Commission's (SWC) Available Storage Acreage Program (ASAP) to form the EIP/ASAP Program. This program combined the Trust's expertise in working with producers with funds available from the SWC's program. Five contracts were signed under the new merger. Accomplishments under the EIP/ASAP Program included working with five producers in Ramsey County, restoration of 135 acres of wetlands in 13 basins, and protection of an additional 63 acres of wetlands and 17 acres of upland cover.

Overview *(continued from page 1)*

the unconventional opportunity. We like to "promote" North Dakota, and we did a lot of that in 2002. We promote

productive use of private agricultural lands, and we promote private property rights that result in long-term enhancement and protection of private lands. We promote effective use of our public lands both for agriculture and recreation. We encourage good land use planning along our urban river corridors. True to our roots, we promote enhancement and protection of the state's significant wetland resources.

Most importantly and most enjoyably, we promote North Dakota as one of the last great places where natural resources abound and are within reach of average people to use and enjoy. We help shape the landscape through our programs, and we do our best to help shape both public attitude and public policy to support natural resource protection.

2002 was a productive and enjoyable year, but we believe it is only the beginning. We look forward to playing an even more important role in shaping North Dakota's future.