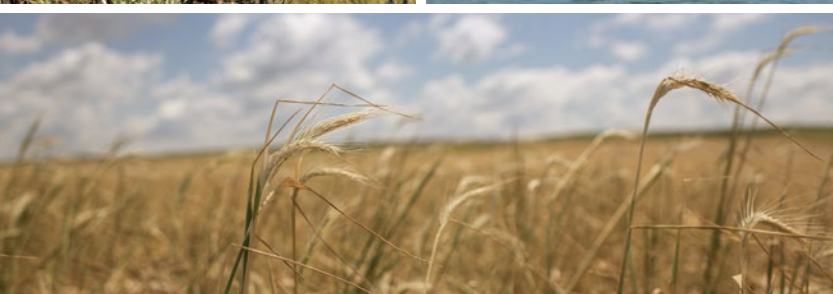
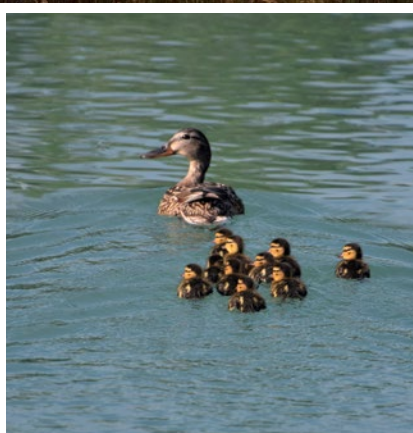


# 2021 Annual Highlights Report



**Prairie Pothole**  
JOINT VENTURE





A large flock of birds, likely waterfowl, is captured in flight against a clear blue sky. The birds are silhouetted against the sky, creating a sense of movement and scale. Below the sky, a range of mountains is visible, with the peaks covered in snow. The foreground shows a dark, rolling landscape, possibly a prairie or wetland, under the warm light of the setting or rising sun. The overall scene conveys a sense of natural beauty and the importance of conservation.

# Our mission

is to implement conservation programs that sustain populations of waterfowl, shorebirds, other waterbirds, and prairie landbirds at objective levels through targeted wetland and grassland protection, restoration, and enhancement programs.

Photo: Kevin Barnes



**Prairie Pothole**  
JOINT VENTURE

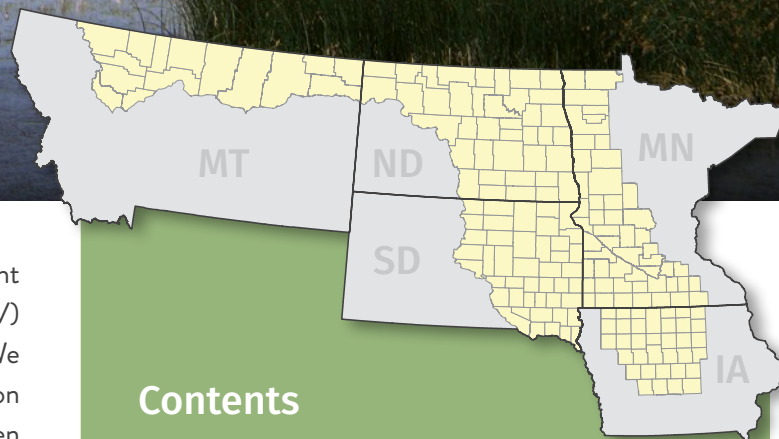
# Letter from the Coordinator

As our partners turn to 2022, it is important to highlight successes within the Prairie Pothole Joint Venture (PPJV) and set ourselves up for progress in the year to come. We continue to make great strides with habitat conservation in the U.S. Prairie Pothole Region and work to strengthen cross-JV conservation planning and implementation. Indeed, a review of our 2017 Implementation Plan's 5-year habitat objectives indicate we have exceeded most of our expectations over that time. However, we must continue to push ourselves as a partnership and be prepared for the ever-changing conservation landscape in the years to come.

Wetland and grassland habitat protection has traditionally been the cornerstone of the PPJV's conservation approach. Private land easement programs within the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), state fish and wildlife agencies, and our non-governmental partners continue to perpetually protect over 100,000 acres a year in cooperation with voluntary landowners. Our partners have exceeded the 5-year goal of protecting 580,000 acres of priority wetland and grassland habitat that was set in our 2017 Implementation Plan.

Further, our collective objectives for habitat restoration and enhancement were far exceeded. The USFWS Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program alone achieved 165% of their goals, with over 350,000 acres of wetlands and grasslands conserved through voluntary landowner agreements. These collective conservation actions allow our partners to support working lands for future generations of agricultural producers.

For our cross-JV work, the [JV8 Central Grasslands Conservation Initiative](#) is gathering momentum as eight Migratory Bird Joint Ventures work collectively to protect and restore grasslands and associated wetlands across the Great Plains. New and exciting initiatives such as a North American Grasslands Conservation Act are forming as we



Casey Stemler

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work with partners of the [Central Grasslands Roadmap](#) in Canada, Mexico, and the U.S. More information about our cross-JV work with NRCS is provided in this annual report.

Beyond our direct habitat conservation work, PPJV partners are using increased communications capacity to inform partners and gather momentum for expanded conservation work. This new year comes with a revamped [PPJV webpage](#), updated communications strategy, and expanding social media presence to reach our traditional PPJV audience and beyond. As we work to leverage these outreach campaigns to increase awareness, we are continuing to challenge ourselves and translate these improved communication outputs to influence social behaviors and improve conservation outcomes across the PPJV geography.

This 2021 annual report highlights noteworthy partnerships in each of our PPJV states, along with our efforts to expand the strong PPJV science foundation to improve conservation outcomes for wildlife and people in the U.S. Prairie Pothole Region.

**Sean Fields, PPJV Coordinator**







Casey Stemler

# Science

## PPJV Science Partnerships in Action: 2020–2021

Josh Vest, PPJV

The Technical Committee actively works to facilitate and support science partnerships that address key information and research needs identified in the PPJV Implementation Plan. Over the past two years, seven projects have been completed and five new projects initiated that have focused on three broad themes: Grasslands & Grasslands Birds, Wetlands & Wetland Birds, and Energy Development.

### Grasslands & Grassland Bird Conservation

Many grassland birds are experiencing steep population declines, and grassland habitat conservation remains a high priority for the PPJV. Recent science partnerships supported



Marissa Ahlering

by the PPJV are informing grassland conservation efforts ranging from improving climate resiliency through grassland restorations, to exploring new tools for conservation programs, to improving information on demographics and land-use associations for steeply declining grassland birds.





**Climate-Proofing our Prairies** – The Nature Conservancy and partners completed a project to improve climate resiliency by increasing genetic diversity of seed sources for grassland restoration efforts in the Prairie Pothole Region (PPR). With support from the PPJV, this partnership developed the Seeds of Resilience Tool, which maps species locations across the region, making it easier for practitioners to find multiple seed sources and build genetic diversity on the lands they manage.

**Grassland Birds** – Thick-billed Longspur population declines are among the steepest of grassland birds in the PPR. A new project at Montana State University supported by the PPJV and USFWS-Migratory Birds is addressing information gaps on demographic rates and land-use associations for this species in the core of their breeding range in Montana. Another new project led by USFWS-HAPET and USDA-FSA is exploring a framework to inform placement and retention of grassland conservation programs that reflect demographic and land-use patterns of grassland birds in the Northern Great Plains and PPR. This project is anticipated to provide insight on patterns of population decline for grassland birds and explore alternatives to guide conservation beyond species distribution models.



Casey Stemler

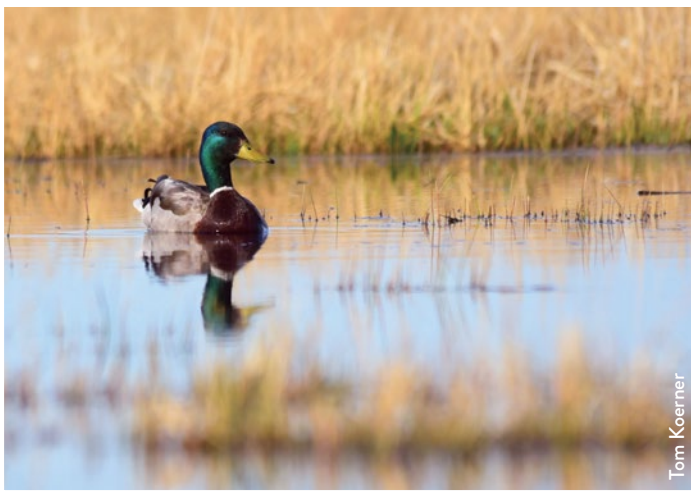
## Conservation of Wetlands, Waterfowl, & Other Waterbirds

**Wetlands in Cropped Landscapes** – The eastern PPR has experienced the most dramatic loss of grassland and wetland habitats in the region from intensive row-crop agriculture, and these land-conversion patterns continue to advance westward. Three projects were recently completed by Iowa State University and partners demonstrating the values of small wetlands to duck broods (Mitchell 2021), the key role semipermanent wetlands play during migration (Ballard et al. 2021), and the benefits of shallow lake restoration to breeding marsh birds (Vanausdall and Dinsmore 2020). A new project with Iowa State University will explore the nexus between water quality and waterbird habitat conservation in the Iowa PPR by assessing the avian values of wetlands that are created or restored to receive water from drain tile. This compliments a range of PPJV research and planning priorities that could help advance collaborative efforts for wetland conservation to improve water quality and wildlife in crop-dominated landscapes.



Kevin Barnes





Tom Koerner

### Novel Inventories of Wetland Resources to Support Conservation

While current wetland data layers such as the National Wetlands Inventory are invaluable, they lack seasonal and annual information on wetland ponding and the temporal resolution necessary to guide restoration of historically drained wetlands. Two new projects will develop novel inventories of potentially restorable wetland basins as well as seasonal dynamics of wetland resources (i.e., ponding) across the PPR. A robust partnership in South Dakota led by South Dakota State University and South Dakota Game, Fish, & Parks with support from NRCS, USFWS, and the PPJV will use remote sensing and new analytical frameworks to develop a geodatabase of restoration potential for historically drained wetlands to support voluntary wetland-grassland conservation programs. Also, through support from the PPJV and other partners, Ducks Unlimited and the University of Texas at Austin will leverage cutting-edge technologies to develop a Google Earth Engine web-tool for mapping seasonal surface water, providing estimates of spring and summer ponding and emergent vegetation dynamics in the PPR. The pilot phase of this research was recently completed (Sahour et al. 2022) and the research team is now working to scale analyses across the PPJV.

### Energy Development & Bird Habitat Conservation

The PPJV continues to support science partnerships that improve our conservation strategies in response to land-use changes such as energy development. Two projects recently

supported by the PPJV and HAPET suggest that changes in duck pair abundance (Loesch et al. 2021) and nest survival (Skaggs et al. 2020) were minimal in relation to oil and gas extraction activity in the Bakken Oil Formation. These projects highlight the need to continue conserving areas where non-renewable energy development overlaps with high priority waterfowl landscapes.

Wind-based energy is anticipated to continue to grow substantially across the PPR and Northern Great Plains over the next several decades. This past year, the PPJV Technical and Policy Committees developed a suite of Guiding Principles for Wind Energy Development in the PPR to reflect common values for responsible wind energy development shared among the partnership and with the aim of fostering collaboration to achieve optimal outcomes among stakeholders.



*...assumption-driven research has enabled this partnership to effectively deliver innovative and cutting-edge conservation for over 30 years.*

### Foundations for the Future

The PPJV's long-term commitment to applied and assumption-driven research has enabled this partnership to effectively deliver innovative and cutting-edge conservation for over 30 years. Science partnerships recently supported by the PPJV will help us to continue to refine and adapt our strategies to address the conservation challenges of today and tomorrow. In the short-term, the new and emerging science summarized here will be invaluable as we look to update the PPJV Implementation Plan and State Tactical Plans and chart our conservation course for the next horizon.





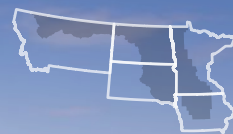
# Prairie Pothole Region

The Prairie Pothole Region is an ecological treasure that was historically one of the largest grassland-wetland ecosystems on earth.

Photo: Mitch Kezar







# Region

Scott McLeod

## PPJV NAWCA Report for FY21

Rick Warhurst, North Dakota Natural Resources Trust

2021 marked the 32nd anniversary of the **North American Wetlands Conservation Act** (NAWCA), a crucial funding mechanism for wetland and grassland habitat conservation that is vital to the PPJV mission. It also marked some important changes in the Central Flyway. Since Terry Steinwand's retirement as the North Dakota Game and Fish Department Director in July 2021, the Central Flyway Council has not had a representative on the NAWCA Council or the NAWCA Staff. Jeb Williams, the new North Dakota Game and Fish Department Director, was nominated by the Central Flyway Council in August 2021 to replace Terry as the Central Flyway representative on the NAWCA Council.

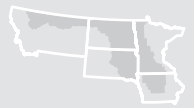


***The North American Wetlands Conservation Act, a crucial funding mechanism for wetland and grassland habitat conservation that is vital to the PPJV mission.***

As of December 2021, Jeb's appointment to the NAWCA Council has not yet been confirmed by the Department of Interior. When Jeb is confirmed and appointed to the NAWCA Council, Rick Warhurst is expected to be appointed to the NAWCA Staff as the Central Flyway representative.







For Fiscal Year 21 (FY21), \$140,104,026 was available for NAWCA, which represented an increase of approximately \$23 million from FY20. Successful FY21 proposals began conservation work in 2021 and are allowed two years to complete the work. The U.S. portion, which totaled \$91,745,621, was allocated to include \$88 million for U.S. Standard Grants and \$3 million for U.S. Small Grants. Though BP Gulf oil spill fine funding has ended, Federal Aid Interest for NAWCA totaled over \$46 million for FY21, which is a significant increase from previous amounts.

**FY21 U.S. Standard Project Proposals:** For round one, thirty-five proposals were submitted to NAWCA, including seven PPJV proposals. In June 2020, the NAWCA Council approved thirty-two proposals totaling \$33,347,813. These were submitted to the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission (MBCC) and all were approved in September 2020, including all seven PPJV projects. The only hiccup was that one PPJV Project from Minnesota (Border Prairie Wetlands VII) requested \$2 million but the NAWCA Staff recommended \$1 million for the project. This funding amount was accepted by Pheasants Forever, who had submitted the project proposal. The seven PPJV Projects approved were each funded at \$1 million and included Prairie Lakes XII Wetland Initiative from Iowa, Eastern South Dakota Wetlands IV, Border Prairie Wetlands VII, Minnesota River Prairies IV, Southwest Wetland Initiative of Minnesota, Iowa-Minnesota Pothole III, and Rocky Mountain Front Protection IV from Montana.

Approximately \$55 million was available for round two, which had thirty-six proposals submitted and scored by NAWCA Staff, including four from PPJV partners. Thirty-two projects totaling \$39,857,644 were approved by the NAWCA Council in December 2020. These were submitted to the MBCC and approved in April 2021. The four PPJV Projects approved included North Dakota Drift Prairie VII and Missouri Coteau Working Wetlands II at \$1 million each; Eastern South Dakota Prairie Conservation at \$2 million; and Minnesota Headwaters Protection and Restoration at \$1 million.

**FY21 NAWCA Small Grants:** Thirty-one proposals were submitted and thirty were scored by the NAWCA Staff Small Grants Committee, including five from the PPJV. Small Grant proposals were submitted by nineteen organizations from nineteen states and from nine Joint Ventures. In February 2021, the NAWCA Council approved funding for twenty-eight of the Small Grant Project proposals for \$2,626,837. Four of the PPJV Projects were approved and included Dale Acquisition for \$75,000 in South Dakota; North Dakota Grazing Lands Improvement Project at \$100,000; and Shelstad WPA Restoration, Douglas and Ottertail Counties WPA Wetland Restoration, and East Central Minnesota Acquisition at \$100,000 each.

As FY22 began, the outlook for NAWCA was bright, with \$21 million carryover in the U.S. The estimated funding available for NAWCA in FY22 was \$117,024,434. This decrease in available funding from FY21 was primarily a result from the decrease in Federal Aid Interest from \$46,715,880 in FY21 to \$21,696,000 in FY22 as the fiscal year began. However, it remains a good time to submit NAWCA Project proposals.







# Iowa

IA DNR

## Wetlands and Prairies Play Important Role in Protecting West Okoboji Lake

Mick Klemesrud, Iowa DNR

**Garlock Slough Wetland Complex, on the southwest side of West Okoboji Lake, Iowa,** is a 900-acre mix of native remnant prairie, restored prairie, natural marsh, and reconstructed wetlands protecting Iowa's most valuable lake. It filters 11 percent of the watershed through its 41 wetlands that make up 246 acres of the complex. In addition to water quality benefits, the area reduces soil erosion with restored prairie and shortgrass eskers on the ridges.

"It's better for the lake, it's better for wildlife – for the grassland birds, wetland birds – and it's better for the overall

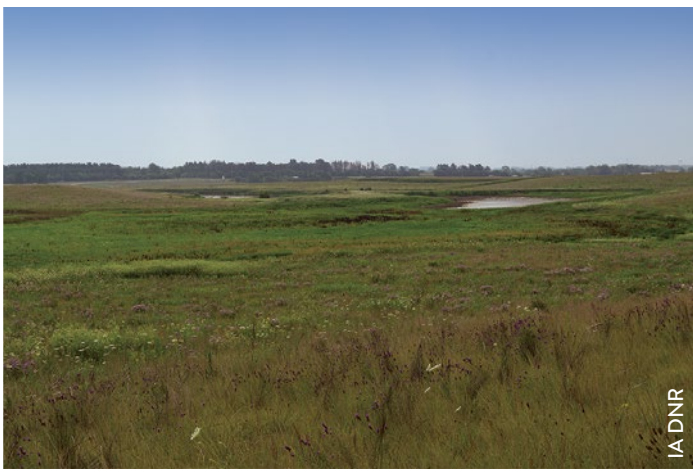
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**Garlock Slough Wetland Complex** filters 11 percent of the watershed through its 41 wetlands that make up 246 acres of the complex.

area's quality of life – for watching wildlife, for hunting, swimming, fishing,” said Chris LaRue, wildlife biologist for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR). “This is a perfect example of a water quality project coming together over time.”







The complex has expanded over the past 20 years and has resulted in improved water quality in Emerson Bay. A DNR and Ducks Unlimited water quality enhancement project set for 2022 will build on those benefits. Contractors will add a concrete pad and small portable sump pump to the northwest corner of the 77-acre Garlock Slough that will allow the DNR to periodically lower the water level to enhance aquatic vegetation and control rough fish populations.

The water will move west to a seven-acre wetland via low flow pumping, then filter back into West Okoboji Lake through the canal that borders Emerson Bay State Recreation Area. A rough fish barrier will be added to prevent carp from entering the slough to spawn.



“

*This is a perfect example of a water quality project coming together over time...It's a heck of a waterfowl complex under normal conditions.*

The area's current mix of quality wetlands and prairie support two nesting pairs of trumpeter swans and is home to some of Iowa's threatened or endangered species, including Poweshiek skipper, white lady's-slippers, rattle milk vetch, Dion skipper, fries pondweed, and water starwort. Standing on a ridge on the west end looking east over the prairie, wild bergamot is in bloom, pale purple coneflower, compass plant, rattlesnake master, and blazing star stand out. Pheasants can be heard crowing. "It's a heck of a waterfowl complex under normal conditions," LaRue said.

The complex is open to hunting except for certain areas that fall under the rule of no shooting within 200 yards of an occupied building. An award-winning bike trail within the Highway 86 right-of-way runs along the south side of Garlock Slough that adds more recreational opportunity and aesthetic enjoyment to the complex.

The project is estimated to cost around \$300,000, with funding from a NAWCA grant and match coming from the state's Lake Restoration Program. It will result in improved aquatic vegetation for long-term water quality and habitat benefits. A new multi-year partnership with the PPJV will support similar restoration work in Iowa PPJV focal areas. This partnership is expected to expand the IA DNR capacity for wetland and grassland habitat restoration for 100-150 acres a year for the next three years.





# Minnesota

Charles L. Betterman

## PPJV Investments Accelerate Habitat Conservation in the Eastern Prairie Pothole Region

Neil Powers, Project Leader, Fergus Falls Wetland Management District

**It's no secret, western Minnesota has sustained significant losses to wetlands (95%) and native grasslands (99%)** that historically provided outstanding habitat for breeding and nesting waterfowl, shorebirds, waterbirds, and grassland birds.



*...reduce habitat losses by supporting restoration efforts on recently acquired conservation easements.*

However, the eastern portion of the Prairie Pothole Region continues to provide critical habitat resources for these species and opportunities to positively influence landscape-level conservation are still prevalent. A newly formed partnership between the Prairie Pothole Joint Venture and western Minnesota Wetland Management Districts aims to reduce habitat losses by supporting restoration efforts on recently acquired conservation easements.

Interest in the sale of perpetual conservation easements by landowners in historically important areas remains high



**Before Wetland Restoration – 2013**



**After Wetland Restoration – 2021**



37 basins | 55.06 acre  
Ida Twp., S20 | Douglas County



Charles L. Betterman

within the Fergus Falls and Morris Wetland Management Districts, offering outstanding opportunities to protect and restore habitats. With the majority of tracts requiring some level of restoration, managers also have the ability to immediately benefit wildlife populations by expanding access to available habitat on an annual basis. Restoration actions typically involve the removal of drain tile, filling surface ditches, invasive tree removal, and/or planting diverse grass and forb mixes. Many tracts require multiple restoration actions to achieve the greatest conservation benefit.

The opportunity to reverse habitat losses has been fueled by receptive landowners and historic levels of funding through the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund. The passing of the Clean Water Land and Legacy Amendment by the

Minnesota Legislature in 2008 offered a rare combination of ingredients that created an unprecedented ability to protect and restore habitat across a broad swath of the eastern PPR. Opportunities to rapidly acquire conservation easements and available grant funding to restore habitat quickly outpaced station capacity to complete timely restoration on newly acquired tracts. By the start of FY21, the Fergus Falls and Morris Wetland Management Districts had accumulated more than 136 tracts representing 12,387 acres that were awaiting restoration. Based upon available staffing, this represented a 4–5-year backlog that was expected to grow with new acquisitions (5,000–7,000 acres annually), strong funding support, and continued interest from landowners.

The potential to grow conservation in the PPR in any budget climate has always hinged on close collaboration with partners. Support from the PPJV enabled field stations to react more quickly to conservation opportunities by filling expanding gaps and responding to immediate conservation need. The infusion of funds provided a vital resource to help stabilize an existing partnership with Pheasants Forever, Inc. to maintain staffing and grow new capacity to address the increasing backlog of restorations. These employees work side by side with field station staff to support conservation delivery within priority areas and are helping to bridge staff capacity limitations.

The PPJV's \$50,000 annual investment is leveraged 2:1 through contributions made by multiple local conservation organizations and several U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service programs within Interior Region 3, including Migratory Birds, Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program, and Refuges. The PPJV's investment was critical and helped catalyze a consortium of partners working to conserve habitat and benefit priority species within the eastern Prairie Pothole Region landscape.







Tanse Herrmann

# South Dakota

## The South Dakota Grassland Coalition - Leading by Example to Advance Grassland Stewardship

Kurt Forman, USFWS Partners for Fish & Wildlife and Judge Jessop, South Dakota Grassland Coalition

The **South Dakota Grassland Coalition (SDGC)** and the **PPJV** share a mutual vision of sustainable grassland stewardship. The SDGC is a rancher-led organization established by visionary landowners in 1998 just as a new era of native prairie loss was beginning to accelerate across the state. Over the past two decades, the SDGC has developed a suite of innovative grassland stewardship and outreach programs that have been invaluable in conserving that state's remaining rangelands during an era of rapid land use change. The PPJV and the SDGC regularly collaborate on education, outreach, and conservation delivery projects. For example, a

multi-year Cooperative Agreement between SDGC and the PPJV was recently concluded which helped support a variety of ranch tours, stewardship videos, and publications, both technical and popular.



*SDGC...innovative grassland stewardship and outreach programs that have been invaluable in conserving that state's remaining rangelands...*







A central theme in many of SDGC's efforts is peer-to-peer communication among landowners with a shared interest in grassland stewardship. For example, the SDGC established a formal mentoring network of experienced producers who make themselves available to assist other parties with a wide variety of ranch management and grazing questions. The mentoring network is comprised of subject matter experts assigned to 26 separate topics ranging from ranch-wide economics to site-specific questions about fence and water installation. Another example of SDGC's very successful landowner-led philosophy is the series of "[Our Amazing Grasslands](#)" videos. The SDGC has completed over 60 professionally produced videos of individual ranches. These videos are both educational and inspirational as they chronicle the grassland stewardship journeys that are unique to each ranch family.

The capstone of SDGC's ongoing education and outreach efforts are the Grazing Schools held throughout the state. Since 2003, SDGC has successfully completed 27 Grazing Schools with over 755 students from six different states. During the two-and-half day program, students attend classroom presentations on grassland ecology, livestock nutrition, grazing utilization, and grassland monitoring. The culmination of the Grazing School is a real-time grazing allocation field exercise where groups of students use temporary fence to install small experimental grazing

paddocks. Each student group then determines vegetation composition in the paddock, calculates 24-hour forage needs for their livestock (3-5 head of yearling cattle), and hypothesize what species of vegetation the livestock will prefer to graze.

On the 2nd day, students return to their experimental paddock to evaluate grazing utilization, forage preference, and determine plant recovery potential. The students then critically assess this information and recommend adjustments for the next 24-hour grazing period. The outdoor classroom portion also provides plant identification exercises, monitoring opportunities, and real-life case-history discussions from SDGC members. The location for the schools since its inception has been in the central part of the state. During 2019, a west river grazing school was added in the Wall/Quinn, SD area. Tentative plans are to add a school in the Coteau des Prairies region in northeast SD.

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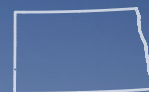
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*Sustainable and profitable livestock production pays for the conservation of grasslands.*

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As we look to the future challenges of grassland conservation, the shared vision and partnership between the SDGC and PPJV will continue to be vital. The essence of this shared view is on the SDGC website, where it is noted that "*Sustainable and profitable livestock production pays for the conservation of grasslands.*" Thanks to visionary ranchers, the SDGC is well-positioned to provide landowner perspectives, resources, and expertise in support of future grassland conservation efforts.





# North Dakota

Ducks Unlimited

## Another Successful Year Acquiring Easements in the PPJV

Randy Renner, Ducks Unlimited, Inc.

Despite all the challenges due to the Covid pandemic, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and Ducks Unlimited, Inc. (DU) partnership had a tremendous year acquiring grassland and wetland easements in the Dakotas and Montana.

The partnership began with the signing of an MOU between DU and the USFWS in 1998 to participate together in the Small Wetlands Acquisition Program. This allows DU to provide funding for easement payments to landowners and personnel for all aspects of the acquisition process. Personnel include a Program Manager, Realty Specialists for due

“  
*...a tremendous year acquiring  
grassland and wetland easements  
in the Dakotas and Montana.*”

diligence and landowner negotiations, part-time contracted Realty Specialists, and Conservation Biologists to seek interested landowners for the program and complete the initial biological evaluations of the property. Conservation Biologists are stationed at USFWS Wetland Management District Offices.





Over the years, the partnership has grown to include many of the partners in the Prairie Pothole Joint Venture, including The Nature Conservancy, Pheasants Forever, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, National Wildlife Federation, National Audubon Society, state agencies, and the PPJV itself.

The bulk of the funding for the easements is provided by the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund (i.e., Duck Stamps). Funding over the years outside of the PPJV partnership has been provided by the Land and Water Conservation Fund, North American Wetlands Conservation Act, The Turner Foundation, Bass Pro, First National Bank of Omaha, David and Margaret Grohne Family Foundation, Remington Outdoors Foundation, National Shooting Sports Foundation, and DU major donors.

Protecting existing wetlands and grasslands is the cornerstone of the PPJV Implementation Plan. The effort of the partnership in FY21 contributed significantly to the goals set forth in the Implementation Plan and State Tactical Plans by perpetually protecting 73,831 acres of grassland and 19,946 acres of wetland habitat. A total of \$75,403,450 was paid to more than 500 private landowners to protect this valuable resource for migratory birds and other associated wildlife.



*Since the partnership began in 1998, the total area protected is made up of **1,473,012 acres of grassland** and **343,836 acres of wetland**.*

Total accomplishments from FY19-FY21 include the protection of 207,423 acres of grassland and 56,574 acres of wetland. Since the partnership began in 1998, the total area protected is made up of 1,473,012 acres of grassland and 343,836 acres of wetland. A huge thanks is owed to all the individuals and groups involved across the PPJV for this tremendous legacy left for generations to come.

The job is not complete, and the work continues every day. There are 1,200 landowners awaiting offers on close to 170,000 acres of grassland and 27,000 acres of wetland. Challenges always exist within the program and against the program but as the old Cherokee chief in the movie *The Outlaw Josey Wales* said, “We will endeavor to persevere!”







# Montana

Hunter VanDonsel

## Ties that Bind: Enriching Partnerships to Achieve Bird Habitat Conservation

Lucinda Morris, PPJV

**Here in Montana, we celebrate partnerships that represent our continued commitment to collaborative conservation.**

In particular, increased connections with USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) have provided in-roads that link JV partners together more than ever before. Where JV-NRCS partnerships have previously occurred opportunistically, this connection is now being formalized through a high-level effort to advance collaboration: the national JV-NRCS Enterprise Partnership. This effort intends to institutionalize existing JV-NRCS relationships and establish a pathway for new partnerships. Through this

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*...increased connections with USDA's NRCS have provided in-roads that link JV partners together more than ever before.*

mutually beneficial arrangement, JVs can help deliver highly effective Farm Bill programs while also providing NRCS with science, communications, and field capacity, thus enhancing the achievement of mutual objectives.





While partnerships with NRCS in Montana have existed for some time, over the last several years the PPJV and our partners have taken bold steps to embody this in new, innovative ways. In 2019, the PPJV and NRCS began a new partnership that saw NRCS provide additional capacity for a dedicated PPJV Communications Specialist, which is hosted by Ducks Unlimited and was filled by Lucinda Morris in August 2020. Additionally, the PPJV will be hiring a term position in early 2022 to deliver technical assistance to NRCS field staff in support of the planning and implementation of Montana Focused Conservation. This will see the PPJV assisting NRCS with data transfer and quantification of conservation practice outcomes associated with locally led Targeted Implementation Plans.

These developments aren't just limited to the PPJV, as our JV neighbor, the Northern Great Plains Joint Venture (NGPJV), is also forging new connections with NRCS. In partnership with Ducks Unlimited, the NGPJV will be hiring a similar term position to provide technical assistance to NRCS in South Dakota. This science integration specialist will translate technical information for local decision makers and co-produce science with field practitioners. While these term positions are hosted by different Joint Ventures, they are cross-boundary positions that will benefit conservation for the PPJV, the NGPJV, and NRCS field staff in eastern

Montana and all of South Dakota. In addition, the NGPJV is providing support for the PPJV's Communications Specialist, and as such is benefitting from the communications capacity made possible by NRCS.



*Working collaboratively with our partners gives us the ability to help without hindering and to build scientifically robust conservation programs that are beneficial to the people, birds, and other wildlife that share this landscape.*

Looking further uncovers more evidence of these partnerships flourishing, with the PPJV providing funding to support a Ducks Unlimited Conservation Specialist and NRCS Partner Biologist based in Great Falls. Adam McDaniel, who was hired for this position in 2017, works collaboratively with Ducks Unlimited, NRCS, and Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks to translate and apply Farm Bill programs for local communities. Providing technical assistance to private landowners interested in enrolling maximizes soil, water, waterfowl, and other wildlife benefits and keeps demand for these programs high.

Beneath the umbrella of NRCS partnerships lies an interconnected framework that binds the PPJV together. Such partnerships help us understand where the bottlenecks are in getting conservation on the ground and identify where we can offer the most needed assistance that will help achieve shared conservation objectives. Working collaboratively with our partners gives us the ability to help without hindering and to build scientifically robust conservation programs that are beneficial to the people, birds, and other wildlife that share this landscape.








**Prairie Pothole**  
**JOINT VENTURE**

922 Bootlegger Trail  
Great Falls, MT  
406-727-7400 x 218

 **PrairiePotholeJV**

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**ppjv.org**