



BRINGING CHEROKEE COUNTY BACK FROM THE BRINK

The southeast corner of Kansas is home to the Springfield Plateau Ecoregion—at one time, an area referred to as “almost a solid sward of prairie grass,” and home to countless species of mammals, birds, amphibians, and other aquatic life.

While the impact of agricultural practices disrupted the proliferation of native grasses and vegetation, it paled in comparison to the effects reverberating from mining practices. For over 100 years (1850-1970), mining companies extracted lead and zinc from the area. However, the problem wasn’t what the mining process extracted. The problem was what it left behind—hazardous metal, lead, zinc and cadmium waste that has since leached into the surrounding environment and wreaked havoc on grass, water, and soil resources.

Since mining processes ceased, things like habitat fragmentation, overgrazing, the tilling of native grasslands, and the introduction of invasive and exotic species continued to further threaten the region’s natural resources.

But thanks to groups like Ducks Unlimited (DU), the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks (KDWP), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE), this small but critical slice of terrain is beginning to resemble the burgeoning native grassland it once was.

Acting under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act, DU, the KDWP and USFWS can identify impacts made to the natural resources and pursue compensation for the damages, then use the funds to purchase, improve, protect, and transfer property to the state of Kansas.



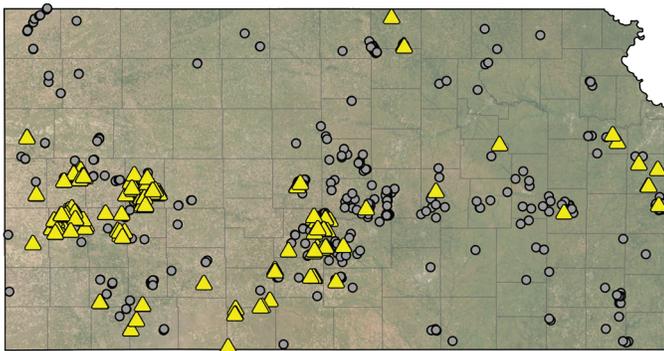
The process, known as Natural Resource Damage Assessment and Restoration (NRDA), has helped rehabilitate and safeguard over 2,700 Cherokee County and Labette County, Kansas acres since 2012, 515 of which, DU played a vital role in the process.

What’s more, NRDA funds for restoration efforts are usable as non-federal match funds for grant applications. That allowed the USFWS to partner with DU to help it receive a \$1 million grant to complete restoration work at the Neosho Wildlife Area, and another \$550,000 grant to acquire property that’s donated back to the Cherokee County restoration project after wetland work is completed.

One recent purchase is 190 acres of emergent wetlands, native grasslands, and forested

woodlands. Neighboring 690 acres owned and managed by the KDWP, DU obtained the property to conserve the native grassland habitat and prevent subdivision and development. The structure of DU’s revolving lands fund is so nimble it allows DU to close on real estate sales faster than other organizations, and like other DU-acquired properties, DU will donate the property to the KDWP in two- to three years after completing restoration projects that benefit the land and wildlife. The property remains open to the public.

Trustees from the Cherokee County restoration project will continue to meet with DU to discuss future restoration projects and ways to continue rehabilitating one of the Sunflower State’s most imperiled landscapes.



Ducks Unlimited PROJECTS

● Completed Project(s) ▲ Completed 2023
Note: Project points may represent more than one project.

NEXTERA ENERGY INVESTS IN SHADDEN MARSH

In early 2023, NextEra Energy Resources, through its charitable arm, the NextEra Energy Foundation, announced an investment of \$60,000 to support the DU Clinton Wildlife Area Shadden Marsh restoration project in Kansas.

Increasing and improving publicly accessible habitat is integral to DU's work in Kansas. As the state is nearly 97% privately owned, working to provide public spaces for outdoor recreation is vital to preserving the state's unique outdoor heritage.

"Now more than ever, it is important for the public to have access to outdoor spaces," said Shawn Battison, DU's Managing Director of Development. "When we can do enhancement work that improves water quality and wetland habitats while providing public recreational opportunities, it is a win-win-win for communities and wildlife."

The project restored 130 acres of Shadden Marsh by installing a water control structure to improve management capabilities and optimize habitat for waterfowl and other migratory birds. Outdoor recreational opportunities, such as wildlife viewing and hiking, are economically vital to the surrounding communities and will benefit from the project.

As many of DU's projects do, this one brings together diverse partners to enhance waterfowl habitat while providing access to important ecosystems for Kansas residents. The Kansas Department of Health and Environment, Kansas Alliance of Wetlands and Streams and the City of Lawrence are supporting the effort as a water quality enhancement project while the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks and the North American Wetlands Conservation Council see it as an opportunity to improve habitat and increase public access. The University of Kansas will monitor the water quality benefits.



R. MICHAEL RHOADES WETLAND PARK OPENS TO PUBLIC

Last November, DU joined the Kansas Alliance for Wetlands and Streams (KAWS) and other organizations supporting the construction of the R. Michael Rhoades Wetland Park at a ribbon-cutting ceremony in Newton, Kansas, dedicating the facility and officially opening it to the public.

KAWS, a nonprofit whose mission is to connect the waters, lands, and people of Kansas, spearheaded the project using funds donated by DU, the R. Michael Rhoades Foundation, the Sunderland Foundation, the Every GreenTeam, Cargill, NextEra, NAWCA and local organizations.

Construction began in 2021. Now completed, the park occupies 7.4-acres inside a larger 19-acre park near the Newton Wastewater Treatment Plant and features wetlands, walking paths, boardwalks, education signs, custom murals, plenty of areas to view waterfowl and more than 150 other bird species and unique birding-by-ear elements for park users who are blind or have poor vision.

Though the park required four years of planning, fundraising, volunteering and construction, the idea originated from trustees at the R. Michael Rhoades Foundation. This organization awards grants to spotlight Harvey County, Kansas, residents who have made a lasting mark on the area's outdoor opportunities. Michael Rhoades, who treasured his time outside, died of cancer in 1992 and the foundation thought it only fitting to name the park in his honor.



DUCKS UNLIMITED conserves, restores, and manages wetlands and associated habitats for North America's waterfowl. These habitats also benefit other wildlife and people.

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KANSAS NUMBERS

2023

- 69 projects
- 11,416 acres conserved
- \$3,347,612 invested

HISTORICAL

- 288 projects
- 103,252 acres conserved
- \$29,179,814 invested



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