



PERKINS COUNTY DAM IMPROVES WATER ACCESS

Last year, Ducks Unlimited (DU) and landowner Phil Jerde of the Great Plains Buffalo Ranch worked together to create a 30-acre impoundment on the property located in Perkins County. Additionally, the installation of a new water control structure in an existing breached secondary dam paved the way for water level management on nine acres of an upstream portion of the 30-acre impoundment. This will improve the management of water levels for waterfowl and other wetland-dependent species that prefer shallow water habitat.

"The location of this impoundment is ideal. The surrounding landscape has

a limited number of suitable wetlands during the waterfowl breeding season, and by establishing 30 acres of dependable wetland habitat in the area, waterfowl and other birds living in this area will have access to additional reliable wetland habitat in which they can thrive," says Randy Meidinger, DU's South Dakota Regional Biologist. The wetland will provide over a mile-and-a-half of undisturbed shallow wetland and shoreline habitat suitable for some wetland bird species and will also provide deeper wetland zones that are used as breeding, feeding and migration habitat for other bird species.

The Jerde family uses most of the acreage on their

conservation-centered operation for bison grazing. "In addition to an array of waterfowl, this earthen structure will provide vital habitat to an abundance of critters, from tiny insects and water bugs all the way up to large mammals," says landowner Phil Jerde. "I'm hopeful that the dam fills to capacity this spring, and I'm anxious to see the diversity of animals the dam will invite."

According to Meidinger, the implementation of a grazing system like the one employed by the Jerdes means many of the grassland acres are left undisturbed for all but a few days during the year, and



over half the grassland acres of the operation are undisturbed throughout the entire waterfowl nesting season.

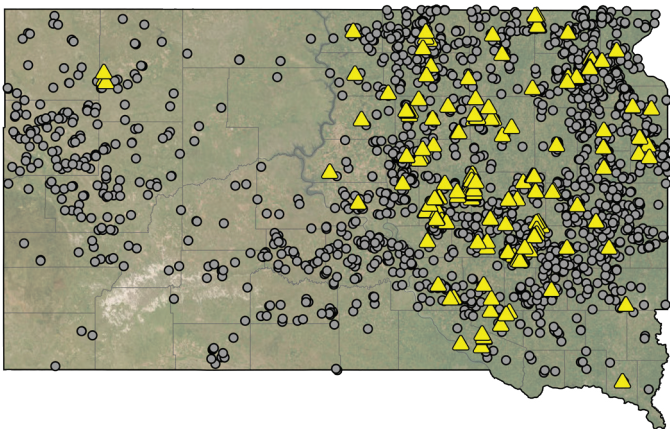
"By strategically utilizing a sound rotational grazing strategy, the Jerde family is improving grassland habitat that will benefit soil health, grassland vigor, and enhance available nesting cover for breeding grassland birds and waterfowl attracted to the area," Meidinger says.

WORKING LANDS CONSERVATION

Last August, DU staff had the opportunity to provide key political leaders with a boots-on-the-ground look at how one South Dakota producer is utilizing working lands conservation programs to support a diversified cattle and row-crop operation near Mitchell.

The focus of the tour was to see first-hand how producer Mike Blaaid is working with state and federal partners to maintain a successful cattle grazing operation that emphasizes grassland conservation and sustainable agricultural practices. Joining Blaaid and DU staff were Ryan Donnelly, legislative assistant to U.S. Sen. John Thune, State Senator Herman Otten of Tea, who also serves as Chair of the State Senate Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources, and State Representatives Scott Moore of Ipswich and David Kull of Brandon.

DU is proud to support working lands conservation programs that provide producers like Blaaid the flexibility needed to support a meaningful grazing operation while also boosting vital acres of grassland habitat that often includes those wetlands most important to upland nesting waterfowl species.



Ducks Unlimited
PROJECTS

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





DU RECEIVES \$25M USDA GRANT FOR SOUTH DAKOTA GRASSLANDS INITIATIVE

As part of the agency's investment in climate-smart agriculture practices, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) awarded DU nearly \$52 million to support projects with farmers, ranchers and landowners in four key areas of the U.S. Of that amount, \$25 million will support the South Dakota Grasslands Initiative.

Operating under the USDA's Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), DU and partners will work with South Dakota producers to restore over 25,000 acres of grassland over five years. The goal is to incentivize a voluntary, partnership-driven approach to conservation on working agricultural lands by combining environmentally beneficial practices with new revenue streams for farmers and ranchers.

"The RCPP allows the project partners to promote a unique incentive program for restoring grasslands and soils, specifically for working lands," said Bruce Toay, DU's manager of conservation programs in South Dakota. "Thanks to the USDA's funding, we can provide attractive incentives for conservation practices that are desired by our cooperating farmers and ranchers. The result is a positive impact on the landscape, more sustainable ag production, and a boost to their bottom line."

The projects will increase carbon sequestration in soils, reduce nitrogen loss, and help capture atmospheric carbon, as well as aid flood water storage, reduce the effects of erosion, and increase migratory waterfowl biodiversity.

LOOKING AHEAD: GOALS FOR 2024

- Restore/enhance 24 wetlands on seven different tracts in Sanborn, Grant, Hanson, Aurora, and Deuel counties.
- Offer technical assistance, cost share for conservation cropping and livestock grazing infrastructure, and soil health monitoring for producers integrating regenerative agricultural practices on 25,000 acres of working lands embedded with shallow wetlands.
- Restore 5,000 acres of marginal cropland soils back to grassland through diverse partnerships.
- Protect 50,000 acres of grassland and wetland habitats with perpetual conservation easements on working lands.
- Develop six soil health demonstration sites and conservation workshops for landowners and cooperators.
- Finance the transition of the Dale Demonstration Farm from Wetlands America Trust to the Beadle Conservation District and facilitate partnerships to maximize outreach opportunities and long-term growth.
- Expand agronomy program and agricultural partnerships to incentivize conservation practices on farmlands in the Prairie Pothole Region.

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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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SOUTH DAKOTA NUMBERS

2023

- 63 Projects
- 90,786 acres conserved
- \$6,896,084 invested

HISTORICAL

- 974 Projects
- 1,226,800 acres conserved
- \$92,907,259 invested



**GREAT PLAINS
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**FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT
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