

NORTH DAKOTA NATURAL RESOURCES TRUST



2023-2027
Strategic Plan

Approved by the Board of Directors
January 17, 2023

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Executive Summary

The loss and degradation of prairie ecosystems has been extensive throughout North Dakota, with only 25% of this habitat remaining. The dramatic disappearance of native grasslands and wetlands has also corresponded to a [significant decline](#) in the diversity and number of grassland dependent species and pollinators. In tandem with the loss of biodiversity, there has also been a significant loss in the number of livestock ranches, a necessary and valued partner in managing grasslands for abundance and the enhancement of native species. The North Dakota Natural Resources Trust (Trust) works to ensure this important part of North Dakota's natural heritage is sustained for future generations.

Since the Trust's creation in 1986, visionary stakeholders realized the delicate balance between ecological and economic forces and the need for a nongovernmental organization that could be innovative and pro-active. The Trust has fulfilled that vision by mediating among partners and demonstrating a new way of doing business.

Over the Trust's 36-year history we have become a constant and reliable partner in the conservation community as well as a sought-out partner by industry and agricultural interests. The challenges and opportunities we face in North Dakota are continually changing, which requires periodic thoughtful updating of our strategic priorities. To help ensure this strategic plan will best meet the needs of our mission and partners, the Trust solicited a professional facilitator to interview partners, board members and staff to help identify core priorities and goals for the next five years. Twenty-seven partners (Appendix 2) contributed to confidential interviews to determine what they viewed as emerging conservation challenges, where the Trust has excelled, and areas the Trust may be best suited to address these challenges. The Trust staff and board met in a two-day retreat to finely tune the direction and tone of how the Trust will approach its mission and goals.

The Trust updates its strategic plan every five years. We recognize the constantly changing environment and the unpredictability of both challenges and opportunities and appreciate the need to constantly survey the situation and react to changes as needed.

Inherent to the operation of any organization is the reality of limited fiscal and staff resources. This reinforces the irrefutable truth that this organization "can do just about anything, it just can't do everything." Responsible action requires established priorities, focus, and a role for the Trust that is well defined, yet continually adaptable to changes.

Central to this updated plan is the idea that the Trust is well positioned to serve our partners and the resource by making good conservation outcomes possible through facilitation, thoughtful partnership building and filling appropriate niches. Over time the conservation challenges we face have changed and so must our approach. We must build our relationships with all stakeholders, particularly recognizing those whose livelihood depends upon vibrant prairie landscapes and local communities.



BULLION BUTTE, WESTERN NORTH DAKOTA. PHOTO: E. ROSENQUIST

The Trust board and staff believe justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion are essential to our organization, community engagement and delivery of conservation programs. We recognize that social, economic, cultural, and geographic connectivity barriers can exist, especially in many of the rural areas in which we work. Each landowner has their own set of experiences and circumstances that may influence their capacity for meaningful engagement with the land and with our organization. This concept drives us to ensure that we strive towards the most appropriate outcomes for all those we work with. The Trust honors and respects the diversity of the citizens of North Dakota, and embraces the range and depth of cultures, experiences, perspectives, skills and knowledge that more diverse groups can bring to our work. Just as biodiversity is a cornerstone of a resilient and sustainable prairie ecosystem, human diversity is paramount to thriving communities.

The board and staff would like to thank all those who contributed their thoughts toward the development of this plan. Without thoughtful and engaged partners our critical work would not be possible.

Mission Statement, Vision and Values

Mission Statement (updated 2023)

To promote the retention, restoration, creation and wildlife friendly management of wetlands, grasslands and riparian areas by presenting practical conservation opportunities throughout North Dakota.



GRASSLANDS AND WETLANDS OF THE MISSOURI COTEAU OF CENTRAL NORTH DAKOTA ARE GLOBALLY IMPORTANT FOR BOTH WATERFOWL AND GRASSLAND BIRDS. PHOTO: NDGF

Our Vision

We envision vibrant prairie landscapes that support abundant wildlife, profitable conservation agriculture and thriving communities.

Our Values



COLLABORATION



INTEGRITY



INNOVATION



ACCOUNTABILITY



SCIENCE-BASED

Collaboration: the Trust values the unique perspectives of all stakeholders and seeks to form shared visions and common goals.

Integrity: the Trust operates with the highest standards of honesty, trustworthiness, and integrity.

Innovation: the Trust recognizes that creativity and innovation are essential to meeting our mission and vision.

Accountability: the Trust holds itself accountable to our mission, our partners, and ourselves.

Science-based: the Trust uses the best available science to guide our actions.

Background

The Trust, originally the North Dakota Wetlands Trust, was born in 1986 out of a conflict over how to address the Garrison Diversion Project's adverse impacts on the state's wetlands. Under the terms of the 1986 Reformulation Act (P.L. 99-294), the United States Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) provided North Dakota the initial \$12 million toward initiation of the North Dakota Wetlands Trust. The state of North Dakota contributed an amount equaling ten percent of the federal contribution (\$1.2 million), equally split between the North Dakota Game and Fish Department, the State Water Commission and the Garrison Diversion Conservancy District.

In December 2000, Congress enacted the Dakota Water Resources Act (DWRA, P.L. 89-108) which renamed the North Dakota Wetlands Trust to the North Dakota Natural Resources Trust and expanded the Trust's mission beyond wetlands and associated upland habitat to include conservation of grassland and riparian areas. Under the provisions of the DWRA, the federal government, through the BOR, will provide the Trust an additional \$25 million. The BOR provides this contribution to the Trust based on five percent of the State Municipal, Rural and Industrial Funds and Red River Water Supply from the annual Dakota Area Office budget appropriation. There were no additional state contributions under DWRA. The Trust does not use the principal from the federal contributions, except as allowable under Public Law 111-85. The investment income received by the Trust from these federal contributions are available for operations. To date, the Trust has received \$16,799,050 of the \$25 million authorized by DWRA. Today, the Trust oversees federal assets of approximately \$28.8 million.

A six-member Board of Directors is mandated by federal law; three members are appointed by the governor of North Dakota, one member is appointed by the National Audubon Society, one member by the National Wildlife Federation, and one member by the North Dakota Chapter of the Wildlife Society. In addition, the board has appointed the North Dakota Game and Fish Department director as a nonvoting ex-officio director to the Trust board. The Trust is not a government entity, it is a nonprofit, citizen-directed organization. Board members are citizens representing North Dakota's conservation, water, and agricultural interests.

The Board of Directors can be innovative and has many options:

- The Trust can acquire land.
- The Trust can obtain conservation easements.
- The Trust can acquire water rights.
- The Trust can fund incentives for conservation practices by landowners.
- The Trust can work to improve natural resource conservation techniques.
- The Trust can work on cooperative projects with private landowners, conservation groups, and government agencies.
- The Trust can promote education to understand why wetlands, grasslands and riparian areas are so important to North Dakota's economic future and our citizen's quality of life.

The Board of Directors recognizes that even though the Trust is a small organization it plays a critical role in natural resource conservation for North Dakota. To do this, the Trust must

carefully weigh which relationships, projects and activities, and strategic directions will pay the most perpetual dividends in the future. Because the Trust is small in staff members, we must form partnerships with other agencies, organizations, and landowners which will sustain natural resource conservation and management.

Landscape Setting

North Dakota's prairie landscapes are composed of many habitat types. Grasslands span most of the state, transitioning from tallgrass in the east, to mixed grass in the central coteau, to shortgrass in the west. Dotted within the grasslands lay wetlands, most of which are in the eastern half of the state. North Dakota also supports several forested areas along with riparian areas.



ECOREGIONS OF NORTH DAKOTA, NDGF 2015 WILDLIFE ACTION PLAN

Grasslands, especially native grasslands, are a habitat type perhaps even more adversely impacted than wetlands in North Dakota; only about 25 percent of its original grasslands remain. Prior to European settlement, North Dakota's native grasslands once covered over 38 million acres and included about 35 percent of all northern mixed-grass prairie in the United States. As of 2017, United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) estimates 9.8 million acres of the state's nonfederal lands were in native rangeland or grazing lands. The [2022 Plowprint](#) report published by The World Wildlife Fund estimated that from 2017-2020 over 500,000 acres of grasslands were removed from the North Dakota landscape.

North Dakota's wetlands are among the most biologically productive places on earth. Wetlands provide food and water for livestock and wildlife. They provide food and resting places for migrating and nesting birds. Wetlands offer year-round habitat for resident creatures, from muskrats to pheasants. Wetlands also perform a variety of societal functions by storing water, thereby reducing the chance of flooding, recharging aquifers, and filtering runoff to improve

water quality. However, many studies estimate that over half of the original wetlands of North Dakota at the time of European settlement have been lost to other uses. Many of these



EVEN IN HIGHLY FRAGMENTED LANDSCAPES WETLANDS ARE IMPORTANT FOR WATERFOWL POPULATIONS. PHOTO: DUCKS UNLIMITED

wetlands are smaller than one acre and are continually being impacted by sedimentation and drainage. Although many wetlands and the surrounding grassland have been removed from the landscape, recent studies show that wetlands in highly fragmented landscapes still retain significant value for waterfowl and other wetland obligate birds and are a resource worthy of conservation.

Riparian and forested habitat has always been in short supply in North Dakota. North Dakota has fewer total woodland acres than any other state. Many prairie water courses have either intermittent or very low flows, limited flood plains and marginal riparian forests which can be easily damaged by natural disaster, disease or incompatible uses. However, while small in acreage, riparian areas are important for numerous wildlife species and vital to stream health. Many of these rivers and streams are listed as ‘Focus Areas’ in the North Dakota [State Wildlife Action Plan](#), published by the North Dakota Game and Fish Department, because of their biological value

With over 90 percent of North Dakota’s lands privately owned, it goes without saying that habitat improvement and protection of our prairie landscapes requires cooperative work between a wide range of partners. The Trust is in a unique position to impact this work by facilitating the relationships necessary to plan and implement sound private land conservation among many partners.

Challenges

The challenges to our mission are numerous and diverse but nearly all result in the degradation or loss of our prairie landscapes. Since the first European settlement of the great plains, society has relied on this landscape to provide the food, fuel, and fiber needed to sustain our country. These demands on the landscape will continue, requiring us to collaborate with all stakeholders for the best possible outcomes for the resource. The highlighted challenges listed below do not represent a comprehensive list but are intended to highlight the major drivers that are currently shaping land use in the northern great plains.

Imbalanced Federal Farm Policy

Current federal farm policy has its origins in the 1930s, when federal crop insurance and other initiatives were implemented to help agriculture recover from the combined effects of the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl. While federal farm policy has evolved over the near century that has passed, the focus on support for crop production over retention of native grassland remains. That is especially ironic considering the dust bowl was partially created by the unwise breaking of millions of acres of native sod, based on a lack of responsible federal farm policy and rampant, , private enterprise speculation during the preceding years.

A variety of factors contribute to this situation. In most instances, crop production is more profitable than grassland agriculture, and broken land often has a higher balance sheet valuation than land in grass. The inertia around basic private enterprise, from lenders to agribusiness conglomerates to landowners themselves, all lean toward crop production. Enhanced crop genetics, use of artificial fertilizers, herbicides and pesticides have all combined to further widen the gap between crop production and grassland agriculture. Crops can now be grown on land once thought to be unsuitable for cultivation.

We recognize that nothing in the policy or private enterprise arena is going to change this scenario, and we do not advocate or even suggest that support for crop production should be diminished. What we do advocate for is recognition of the immense and diverse value of grasslands. Grasslands support a host of ecological goods and services including, but not limited to, reduced soil erosion, enhanced water quality and wildlife production, including dozens of threatened species of grassland birds. Additionally, grasslands support livestock production and the grass based agricultural industry that is the lifeblood of ranch families and small communities across North Dakota and the nation.



MAINTAINING VIABLE RANCHING ECONOMIES IS ESSENTIAL FOR
RETAINING GRASSLANDS. PHOTO: NDNRT

We advocate for an enhanced federal policy support structure that reflects the recognition of the value of retaining grasslands. The days of considering any acre that cannot support crop production as “waste land” in a real estate appraisal or on a balance sheet should be in the past. Many hard lessons have been learned about the care of our precious and irreplaceable agricultural land. Providing proper respect and support for grasslands and grass-based agriculture would be the capstone of our maturation as an agrarian society.

Energy Development

North Dakota is a highly desirable location for energy production. The Bakken oil and gas field in the northwest part of the state is a world class reservoir, producing over a million barrels of oil a day. Additionally, much of North Dakota is highly suitable for wind development. From 2015-2021, wind generation more than doubled in North Dakota and the move toward renewable energy sources appears to be accelerating. As of 2022, North Dakota was 6th in the nation with 4,302 megawatts of installed wind capacity. Finally, the coal deposits of central North Dakota have long been a critical supplier to our energy grid, producing over 9,500 megawatts of electricity. All these energy sources have a significant impact on the landscape.



WIND TOWERS IN EASTERN NORTH DAKOTA. PHOTO: NDNRT

The value of these resources to society cannot be understated. There are many benefits to the development of a variety of energy sources, however the landscape they modify is critical to the health of North Dakota's wildlife and prairie ecosystem. For example, approximately one-third of the continental population of sharp-tailed grouse are estimated to reside in North Dakota, and North Dakota prairies are critical to the Dakota skipper butterfly (listed as federally threatened). Our challenge will be to work with these industries in a way that does not impede energy development but guides this development in ways more conducive to maintaining these essential native habitats.

Weather Variability and Extremes

Weather variability is a natural part of our world. However, in recent years extreme weather events such as droughts and floods have become more frequent and intense, often occurring outside of typical seasons creating cumulative impacts. These events place increased stress on our natural systems, wildlife populations and local producers. Enhancing grasslands to provide resiliency to ranching operations during weather extremes will allow ranchers to remain profitable and endure weather hardships. Conceivably, this will reduce the temptation to convert their lands to cropland.

Emerging Opportunities

Despite the significant challenges on the landscape, there are also glimmers of hope and opportunity. There are indications that the general population is becoming more engaged in the state of the environment and the food systems they utilize. There is also recognition among the conservation community that while our challenges are significant, we are best when working together towards common goals. Non-traditional partners are now showing interest in

certain aspects of conservation which adds a new level of sophistication, opportunity and effectiveness to contemporary conservation work.

Regenerative Agriculture Movement

The projected impacts of a changing climate have placed a new lens on land use in North Dakota and point to our prairie landscapes as being central to the solution of removing greenhouse gases from the atmosphere. A [recent report](#) from The Nature Conservancy suggests that over 30 percent of all carbon emissions from North Dakota could be biologically captured in our soils by the widespread application of practices that retain grasslands, and other practices consistent with regenerative agriculture philosophies. These practices closely align with our vision of supporting viable prairie landscapes in North Dakota.

Regenerative agriculture practices are gaining awareness and adoption among producers. These practices may offer the opportunity to show how profitable agricultural practices also create and maintain critical habitats. The application of regenerative practices is capturing the attention of the public and some financial institutions which work with agricultural producers. This nexus of interests offers a unique opportunity to build alliances with agricultural interests.



REGENERATIVE PRACTICES ARE GAINING ADOPTION IN THE RANCHING COMMUNITY. PHOTO: CAMI DIXON

Partner Collaboration

Conservation partners are deepening their coordination and collaboration. In 2021, the North Dakota Game and Fish Department launched the [Meadowlark Initiative](#) which seeks to tap into the collective insights, resources and efforts of conservation, agriculture and industry partners, to enhance, restore and sustain native grasslands in North Dakota. In its first year alone, this initiative, in partnership with the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), has secured over \$2.4 million in cost-share funding for North Dakota landowners.

Additionally, the North Dakota Association of Soil Conservation Districts has launched the [Dakota Legacy Initiative](#) to better service interested landowners and Soil Conservation District staff seeking to explore cost-share options available by all partners. Other collaborations such as Joint Ventures also provide a forum for varied partners to build on each other's strengths to better serve the resource and local communities.

Generational Change

Over the next decade, it is projected that as those of the "baby boomer" generation retire from agriculture the potential transfer of their wealth and property assets will be immense. Many producers already struggle with succession planning, and for those with no family interested or available to take over the operation there is the potential that the land will be sold, which further increases the chance grasslands will be converted to other uses. Estate planning includes more than the finances and tax planning. Often family relationships and dynamics play

a significant role in the transition process. Our work with partners and developing programs that assist families to preserve their legacy of grassland stewardship helps further the Trust's mission of safeguarding North Dakota's prairie heritage.

Social Support

Social scientists have studied the decision-making process for adopting new and innovative practices in agriculture and have identified that strong social support networks are critical to moving interested individuals along the continuum from having an interest to incorporating new practices in everyday operations. Through mentoring support and coaching, newly adopted practices such as cover cropping, rotational grazing and prescribed fire have a greater likelihood of success and continued use in the farm or ranch operation.

Developing social networks to assist producers also helps with increasing social capital, which can influence opinions in areas where new practices are not readily accepted by the larger community. Social networks for producers have a

particular importance in rural areas where regular access to professional technical advice is impaired by distance and staff limitations. By providing support to those organizations promoting and assisting with support networks, we can accelerate the adoption of practices that contribute to our mission.

"WE'RE NOT GOING TO HAVE AS MANY YOUNG FAMILIES. IT'S JUST GETTING VERY HARD FOR PEOPLE TO MAKE A LIVING OFF THE LAND."

-SURVEY COMMENT

Funding Initiatives

We are currently in an era of ample funding opportunities which allows us to diversify our financial resources. At the state level, the North Dakota [Outdoor Heritage Fund](#) (OHF) remains a strong and stable source of funding. To date, the OHF has granted more than \$72 million for conservation and recreation projects in North Dakota. At the federal level, recently passed legislation such as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, the Inflation Reduction Act, the fully funded Land and Water Conservation Fund, and the America the Beautiful Challenge provide more funding opportunities than ever. The North American Wetland Conservation Act (NAWCA), National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and USDA Farm Bill programs also provide funding opportunities at levels never before experienced. The Recovering Americas Wildlife Act and North American Grasslands Conservation Act are two additional proposals still in Congress which, if passed, would create significant funding resources. The Trust will continue to utilize funding sources as they become available to develop new partnerships and programs, or to expand existing ones, where operationally possible.

Strategic Planning Process

Strategic plans for the Trust are developed with a five-year life span, this being the Trust's seventh plan. Previous plans have served the Trust well; since 2017, the Trust has directly influenced the conservation on hundreds of thousands of acres of private land in North Dakota. Because of the increased urgency of our Mission, and to capture the feedback of our many stakeholders, the Trust worked with a professional facilitator during the development of this plan to accomplish several needs. Interviews were conducted with 27 individuals from conservation, agriculture and energy partner organizations, as well as private landowners with agriculture operations. The goal of the interviews was to provide the Trust board and staff with information on what are perceived to be the main conservation challenges in North Dakota, how the Trust has functioned in its past conservation roles, and how we can best position ourselves to provide the most valuable services in the future.

These interviews expressed four primary themes:

- 1) The continued rapid loss of the elements of our prairie landscapes as paramount.
- 2) Reframing our work and language around shared priorities with the agricultural sector may help reduce barriers. An example of this would be framing issues around soil health and producer economic considerations.
- 3) The Trust is seen by all as a valued partner with a strong history of "getting stuff on the ground," due to our ability to work effectively with other organizations through easy and straightforward interactions.
- 4) The Trust's foremost strength was identified as our ability to convene different groups for the common goal of conservation. This was often attributed to our ability to communicate with landowners and manage programs amenable to landowner wishes. Recognized as an organization that originated and solely operates in North Dakota, the Trust is acknowledged as having a strong connection with and understanding of what is important to landowners and producers in this state. This expectation of support, honesty, and integrity empowers us to create strong partnerships between landowners and a variety of conservation programs.

"THE CORE THAT MAKES THE [TRUST] WORK AS AN ORGANIZATION IS . . . PARTNER RELATIONSHIPS [AND] COMMUNICATION, AND THAT IS SOMETHING THAT SHOULD NOT BE LOST"

-SURVEY COMMENT

In addition, several suggestions for improvement were noted. These include better and more frequent communication with our partners, the need to manage over extended staff workloads, and the adoption of new technologies and processes to increase efficiency.

Following the summary and dissemination of the interview results, the board and staff met over two days in a facilitated setting to craft the elements expressed in this document. Final board ratification of the document occurred January 17, 2023. We wish to express our deepest appreciation to all our partners who shared their candid thoughts and contributed to the development of this plan.

2023-2027 Strategic Priorities and Goals

Recognizing that the loss of the prairie ecosystem is the foremost conservation challenge we face in North Dakota, the Trust will implement a multi-faceted strategy designed to incentivize grass-based economies, broaden the conversation around the value of our prairie landscapes and lift our partners so we can accomplish more, together. This will require the engagement of new partners with new perspectives as well as continued collaboration with existing partners. This collaboration will seek to influence policy and develop mechanisms which incentivize grassland retention and the adoption of management practices which support vibrant prairie landscapes and those who rely on these landscapes for their livelihood.

We will focus on three primary areas:

Private Land Conservation

The Trust will collaborate with its vast network of partners across North Dakota to support functional natural systems and wildlife friendly habitat management practices by providing incentives for the creation, retention and restoration of habitat on private lands.

Conservation Innovation & Partnerships

The Trust recognizes that our mission can only be realized through the facilitation of strong partnerships as well as being a catalyst for the adoption of effective, innovative and science-based conservation practices.

Organizational Strength

The Trust will be financially resilient, efficient, and promote a culture which represents our values. The Trust will ensure that financial resources and internal business systems are managed for long-term viability of our organization.

To advance these strategies, the Trust has developed five goals. However, since conservation delivery is complex, it will require work and understanding within multiple functional areas, such as policy, delivery, communications and science to achieve success. The Trust works through a web of partnerships and programs to deliver conservation solutions. Because of this, each of our goals are interconnected to our strategies and cannot be tied to just one. Under each goal is a brief description of potential means to achieve each goal. Programs and projects will be developed and their contributions to specific goals will be assessed on an ongoing basis.

Goal A.

Utilize existing and develop new programs for the voluntary retention, restoration and creation of grasslands, wetlands and associated habitats. We will contribute to the retention of 100,000 acres and creation/restoration of 2,000 acres of grassland and wetland habitats throughout North Dakota.

Funding sources, such as the North Dakota OHF, will make it possible to serve interested landowners wishing to complete conservation projects. The Trust's use of current and future funding sources, we will continue to provide cost-share opportunities for landowners. Our cost-share opportunities will be associated with a contract which will ensure the retention of those habitats for various durations. Considering the need to engage with private landowners, these programs, along with development of new programs, will play a significant role in maintaining habitat as well as ranching lifestyles. Combined with the effective use of cost-share programs we will focus on policy barriers for the implementation of various conservation programs in North Dakota.

Goal B.

Convene with diverse stakeholders to champion the discussion on habitat loss with the intention of increasing awareness and appreciation of natural systems and crafting programs and policy which increase the adoption of ecologically and economically sustainable grass-based practices.

The unique position of the Trust in the conservation community allows for it to take advantage of relationships with the energy industry, agriculture, and non-traditional partners to advance issues supporting our conservation priorities. The current interest in carbon management and regenerative practices may form a nexus to support habitat restoration and management. Non-traditional partners such as financial institutions may also help develop tools such as succession planning, estate planning, and beginning rancher programs which, with proper guidance, may be used to further build a community of grass-based agriculture. There is an opportunity to elevate the use of the Conservation Reserve Program and increase the funding and focus of the OHF to support grass-based practices.

Goal C.

Increase our financial support of projects which produce educational aspects around the value of prairie landscapes, healthy soils, and grass-based regenerative practices.

The partner assessment summary illustrated the need for more education of stakeholders. While the Trust does not specialize in education or outreach, we have the ability through our Small Grant Program, cooperative agreements, and other mechanisms to help others build novel practices to deliver education and outreach activities.

Goal D.

Expand existing and develop new partnerships to capitalize on emerging opportunities. Our partnership involvement will result in the Trust directly impacting at least 20 projects that otherwise might not have been possible.

The Trust can make a difference by hosting staff positions, as we currently do with the Meadowlark Initiative and NAWCA staff. There are opportunities through our Cooperative Agreement model to contribute to field positions for other agencies and organizations working on a common goal as they deal with increased workloads and staff turnover. We can also provide extra or unique support to partners pursuing the adoption of new and innovative programs. The Trust has been, and should continue to be, a key facilitator on acquisition projects.

Goal E.

The Trust will refine our administrative systems and processes to increase efficiency and our ability to collaborate with partners.

All organizations must continually adapt their internal business systems to efficiently meet the requirements of their mission. Current workloads and demands for information are stressing our internal systems. We will focus on improvements in our use of technology to better collaborate internally, as well as serve the needs of our staff, board and partners.



THE BIG OXBOW PROJECT WAS A COLLABORATIVE PROJECT LED BY THE TRUST IN NORTHWEST NORTH DAKOTA. PHOTO: VERN WHITTEN.

Human Resources

Board of Directors

Board members serve two-year terms with no limit on reappointments. The current board includes the following individuals:

Dave Dittloff	National Wildlife Federation
Jerry Doan	Gubernatorial Appointee
Duane Hauck	Gubernatorial Appointee
Randy Renner	North Dakota Chapter of the Wildlife Society
Kristal Stoner	National Audubon Society
Gene Veeder	Gubernatorial Appointee
Scott Peterson for Jeb Williams	North Dakota Game and Fish Department Director, Ex-officio member

Staff

The Trust currently employs seven individuals as both exclusive employees of the Trust or in partnership with others. The current staff includes the following individuals:

Keith Trego	Executive Director
Brenda Newton	Administrative/Conservation Specialist
Terry Allbee	Business Manager/Biologist
Jesse Beckers	Energy Program Manager
Eric Rosenquist	Conservation Programs Coordinator
Heather Husband	Meadowlark Initiative Coordinator
Rick Warhurst	North American Wetland Conservation Act staff/North Dakota Action Group Coordinator

Financial Overview

As the Trust board and staff embark on this 5-year plan, the significance of managing all the Trust's fiscal assets to achieve the goals of this strategic plan is of great importance. The Trust will continue to emphasize the appropriate management of its fiduciary responsibilities. The foundation of the Trust's annual operations are the investment earnings from the federal contributions, state contributions and retained earnings. The Trust currently has investment holdings of about \$35 million, the bulk of these investment holdings are federal contributions from BOR. These federal funds have restrictions on the use of principal, except under Public Law 111-85. The state contribution and retained earning do not have principal spending restrictions.

The Trust board hires an outside investment firm to manage and invest trust assets based on an investment policy established by the board. Funds needed to conduct Trust business on a regular basis are held at a local bank. The Trust also contracts with an independent accounting firm for an annual audit of all Trust business dealings.

In 2009, the Trust adopted its current business model of sweeping investment earnings into a secure cash account, the year prior to when the funds will be needed. That known amount of the prior year's earnings informs the board's budget decisions for the upcoming year, ensures cash is available to cover all financial commitments and precludes the need to sell investment securities in times of a down market. This business model has served the Trust extremely well. Through the board's careful management of expenditures, staffing levels, investments and grant dollars, the Trust has managed to attain some level of financial stability and resiliency. Based on current budgets and operational levels the Trust has reserved spendable cash available to continue current operations in case of reduced income. The Trust works to continually balance the need to keep sufficient reserve funds with the critical demand to fund on-the-ground conservation.

The Trust's conservation business has grown over the years through our strategic use of partnerships and our success in obtaining outside grant funds. The leveraging of Trust investment earnings to secure outside grant funds continues to be important to have an increased impact in fulfilling the Trust's mission.

As we embark on this 5-year strategic planning cycle, it is fair to say the Trust is as financially strong as it has ever been in its history. It is the board's intention to keep the balance between conservation delivery and fiscal sustainability at approximately its current level.

Acknowledgements

The board and staff of the Trust would like to thank the numerous partners who contributed their time and expertise to the development of this plan. We also would like to thank Rachel Gooen with Gooen Consulting for the efforts she and her team made conducting and summarizing interviews, facilitating the board and staff workshop and providing guidance and insight as we developed this plan.



GRASSLANDS OF THE NORTHERN PLAINS ARE AMONG THE MOST DIVERSE ECOSYSTEMS IN THE WORLD AND BUILD CARBON IN THE SOIL. CROSS RANCH PRESERVE. PHOTO: E. ROSENQUIST

Appendix 1.

Hyperlink addresses and citations

Dyke, Steve R., Sandra K. Johnson, and Patrick T. Isakson. 2015. North Dakota State Wildlife Action Plan. North Dakota Game and Fish Department, Bismarck, North Dakota.

Dakota Legacy Initiative: <https://www.dakotalegacyinitiative.com/>

North Dakota Outdoor Heritage Fund: <https://www.ndic.nd.gov/outdoor-heritage-fund>

North Dakota Game & Fish, Meadowlark Initiative: <https://gf.nd.gov/meadowlark-initiative>

Staples, M., S. Graber, and M. Jansen. 2022. Biological Carbon Capture Solutions for Resilient Natural and Working Lands in North Dakota. The Nature Conservancy.
<https://www.nature.org/en-us/newsroom/nd-bio-carbon-capture-report>.

World Wildlife Fund 2022 Plowprint Report: <https://www.worldwildlife.org/publications/2022-plowprint-report>

Appendix 2.

List of organizations that contributed towards the creation of this plan.

Audubon Dakota

Bowman Slope Soil Conservation District

Delta Waterfowl

Duck Unlimited Inc.

Hess Petroleum

National Fish and Wildlife Foundation

North Dakota Agriculture Coalition

North Dakota Department of Agriculture

North Dakota Farmers Union

North Dakota Game & Fish Department

North Dakota Grazing Lands Coalition

North Dakota Soil Conservation District Employees Association

North Dakota Soybean Growers Association

North Dakota Stockmen's Association

North Dakota Petroleum Council

North Dakota Wildlife Federation

Northern Great Plains Joint Venture

Pheasants Forever

Prairie Pothole Joint Venture

The Nature Conservancy

USDA/Natural Resources Conservation Service (state & county level)

USDA/US Forest Service

US Fish & Wildlife Service- Private Lands

US Fish & Wildlife Service- Ecological Services

Private Landowners (3)