

2004 ANNUAL REPORT

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Success in life or in work is often measured by one's ability to capture what's available at a specific point in time, to identify and insert one's self into "windows of opportunity." In organizations like the Natural Resources Trust, these "opportunities" involve many facets—programs and funding, strong partnerships, competent staff, flexibility to act quickly and decisively and, most importantly, willing landowners who embrace conservation and land protection opportunities. While many past years have found the Trust involved in a large number of relationships with private landowners, completing project segments that involved farm-by-farm or ranch-by-ranch elements of landscape level projects, 2004 was a year of opportunity to complete major segments of large projects. These segments included:

Confluence Project - In December 2004 one of the largest partnership projects in North Dakota conservation history culminated in the purchase of nearly 1,500 acres at the confluence of the great Missouri and Yellowstone Rivers in the northwest part of the state near Williston. The acquisition of the Neu tract of about 500 acres closed in November 2003. In December 2004 the closing occurred on the Ochs tract of about 1,000 acres. The resulting 1,500 acres will protect the view shed from the state's new Confluence Interpretive Center constructed and managed by the Historical Society of North Dakota. It will protect, recognize, and honor the significance of this piece of North American landscape to the Lewis and Clark Voyage of Discovery and contribute to the state's growing tourism industry. It will provide a priceless addition to the state's system of public lands set aside for hunting, fishing, bird watching, and all manner of natural resource use and appreciation.

Missouri River Land Protection - Working with private landowners who desire to sell their land for a conservation project, as was done at the Missouri/Yellowstone confluence, is sometimes the most appropriate means of land protection, but there are other means. Land protection easements, which purchase only a portion of property rights, such as development rights, from willing landowners but leave the land in private ownership, are another tool that can work well in certain situations. North Dakota has a variety of laws that limit private landowners' use of land protection easements, but working with determined landowners, the Trust and a coalition of partners have had success using the US Department of Agriculture's Farm and Ranch Land Protection Program (FRPP). FRPP, administered by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), is a farm bill program designed to keep working farm and ranch land in agricultural production by purchasing the real estate development rights. In May 2003, a partnership coalition submitted North Dakota's first FRPP proposal, and on March 8, 2004, the transaction closed, thereby protecting 113 acres of farm land, river bottom woodlands, and oxbow wetlands along the free-flowing Missouri River north of Mandan.

Eberts (aka Elkhorn) Ranch - Over the past several years, discussions have been ongoing between the Eberts family, current owners of badlands property upon which President Theodore Roosevelt grazed cattle adjacent to his Elkhorn cabin, about a public project that would acquire the land and hold it in public trust. Initial discussions began with the National Park Service (NPS), then entailed the concept of a joint federal/state project, and more recently a state project. The Trust was approached as a possible

Trust Expands Wetland Incentive Program

by Terry Albee

The ND Natural Resources Trust has been active in promoting conservation-friendly practices of the US Department of Agriculture's Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). The Trust has offered these wetland restoration incentives since 1997. The Trust's incentive program has been placed on over 1,700 wetlands totaling over 3,000 wetland acres. We have expanded this program to include all conservation programs by all conservation partners through the financial assistance of the US Fish and Wildlife Service's Challenge Cost Share Grant Program. The Trust was awarded \$25,000 in Challenge Cost Share funds to be matched dollar-for-dollar with Trust funds. This new opportunity will allow the Trust to offer a wetland incentive payment on every wetland restored in North Dakota's prairie pothole region.

Wetland Incentive Rates:

10-year contracts: \$20/wetland acre or \$100/wetland basin.

20-year contracts: \$30/wetland acre or \$150/wetland basin.

30-year contracts: \$40/wetland acre or \$200/wetland basin.

Perpetual contracts: \$50/wetland acre or \$250/wetland basin.

Walhalla WRP Project Completed

by Merle Bennett

All wetland and upland restorations were completed on the Walhalla WRP tract in late 2004. Wet conditions delayed the wetland restorations all summer, but fall drying finally allowed a contractor to complete construction of a dike, diversion, and drop-log structure that restored the 200+ acres wetland. Two ditch plugs were constructed to restore smaller (about one acre each) wetlands that had been previously drained.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service

(NRCS) first approached the Trust in late winter 2001 about



the potential for restoration of a large drained wetland basin near the town of Walhalla in Pembina County. NRCS had been working with landowners (four) who had contacted them about enrolling the basin and some surrounding lands in the Wetland Reserve Program (WRP). The landowners ultimately rejected the WRP offer, but indicated a willingness to sell outright. The Trust's board of directors approved the acquisition in November 2001 and the purchase was completed in March 2003. Financial assistance for the acquisition was provided by the US Fish and Wildlife Service along with grant monies from the North American Wetlands Conservation Act. The Trust and NRCS then transferred WRP enrollment from former landowners to the Trust.

Seeding of uplands to native grass, as required by WRP, was completed on the approximate 200 acres of former croplands in May/June 2004. The seed mixture included seven species of native grass, two forb species, 20 lbs. of a special mix of 30 forbs and wildlife species, and about five pounds per acre of oats nurse crop. Re-seeding of the area disturbed by construction of the water control structure will be done in the spring of 2005 and clipping of weeds to allow better grass growth will continue for at least one more year.



Transfer of the completed project to the North Dakota Game and Fish Department is planned for late summer 2005.

2004 Grant Reports

by Linda Roeder

Gateway to Science, "Earth Wellness" Environmental Festival: The fifth annual "Earth Wellness" Environmental Festival was held on March 17, 2004, at Bismarck State College. Total attendance was up 27 percent over the previous year with 998 fifth-grade students, 46 teachers, and 25 chaperones. Presenters offered 23 different sessions on various aspects of the environment – nine of which contained significant discussion regarding habitats.

(Continued on next page)

Grants *(continued from previous page)*

Delta Waterfowl Foundation, Adopt A Pothole, Missouri Coteau Region: Within the Missouri Coteau Region of North Dakota, 592 total acres were sustained as conservation areas during 2004. These acres included 156 wetland acres, 127 native upland acres, and 309 acres of crop land seeded to dense nesting cover (DNC). Five of eight contracts will expire in November 2005 and three will expire in November 2006. Each landowner in the Missouri Coteau Region was sent a letter highlighting the ND Natural Resources Trust's Midterm Conservation Easement Program as a program of possible interest.

Sheyenne James Resource Conservation and Development Council, Nonpoint Source Pollution Best Management Practice (BMP) Team: The purpose of the BMP team is to provide engineering assistance for the installation of BMPs to improve and protect surface and ground water quality and to control soil and water erosion in priority areas. The Sheyenne James RC&D provided engineering assistance to 31 water quality best management practice projects in 2004. Twelve animal waste systems (AWS) and one shoreline restoration project were completed in the LaMoure/Dickey County Watershed. Nineteen preliminary and final AWS designs were completed. Five surveys were also completed.

Coalition for Conservation and Environmental Education (C²E²), ND Envirothon: 2004 found the fifth annual ND Envirothon Competition at Crystal Springs Camp west of Medina, North Dakota, May 13-15. One hundred fifty (150) students, advisors, committee members, volunteers, and guests attended the competition. This year, 16 teams participated in the three testing trails and two oral presentations for a chance to represent North Dakota in West Virginia August 1. Kenmare High School Team #3 took first place, the Barnes County 4-H team came in second, and third place went to Crosby High School.

Foster County Soil Conservation District, "Trees" Education Series: The environmental education series of six programs are designed to educate youth and adults in an entertaining way about environmental concerns that affect all members of society. Tom Gibson of Bottineau, North Dakota, continues the lyceum-style programs incorporating

character roles, visual aids, audience participation, and additional educational materials to effectively educate participants on such issues as water quality, nonpoint source pollution, and the depletion of our natural resources. 'Trees' continues to be highly respected and has significant exposure to students across the state. During the 2003-04 school year, 577 programs were presented to 38,603 students.

Ducks Unlimited, Inc. (DU), Promotion of No-till Winter Wheat: Winter wheat average yields exceeded 100 bushels per acre for the second straight year. One hundred eight (108) contract growers in the five county contract area seeded a total 13,628 acres to winter wheat. Statewide, 245,000 acres of winter wheat had been planted through 2004.

Education and research remain the main focus of the project with 460 participants attending demonstrations and research trials during the year. The regional agronomist made 15 presentations to over 1,200 attendees at meetings and tours in North Dakota, South Dakota, Minnesota, and Manitoba. Winter wheat information was presented through radio interviews, newspaper and magazine articles. Technical assistance was provided to other wheat growers who chose not to receive incentives.

DU and its agronomy program were recognized by the ND Chapter of the SWCS with its Business Stewardship Award and by the Dakota Lakes Research Farm Board of Directors at Pierre with the Friends of Dakota Lakes Award.

No-Till Drills: One soil conservation district that received funds to purchase or rent no-till cereal, planter, or seed drills reported 18 participating landowners treated 2,274.2 crop land acres and enhanced 126 wetland acres in 2004.

Summary of Wetland Conservation Grants:

- **US Fish & Wildlife Service, Chase Lake V Prairie Wetlands** created and restored 11.9 wetland acres.
- **US Fish & Wildlife Service, Missouri River Wetlands** created and restored 5.6 wetland acres.
- **US Fish & Wildlife Service, Chase Lake Wetland Project** restored and created 90 wetland acres.
- **US Fish & Wildlife Service, Northern Coteau III Project** restored 46.0 wetland acres.

(Continued on page 5)

Report *(continued from page 1)*

funding partner and facilitator to engage other partners for acquisition and possibly management costs. An integral part of the acquisition plan was application of a land protection easement under another farm bill program called the Grassland Reserve Program (GRP). This project was not completed in 2004 and, as the year came to a close, the now state project was being referred to the 2005 legislative assembly for further consideration of state funding and other management issues. But the funding, partnerships, and facilitation are representative of the approach the Trust can bring to large, landscape level projects. We remain optimistic this fine project can yet be brought to a successful conclusion.

Trust Projects — 2004 Accomplishments

Wetlands

• Total Producers - 54	
• Wetlands Restored/Created	441.9 acres
• Wetlands Protected	<u>1,826.4 acres</u>
Total	2,268.3 acres

Associated Wildlife Habitat

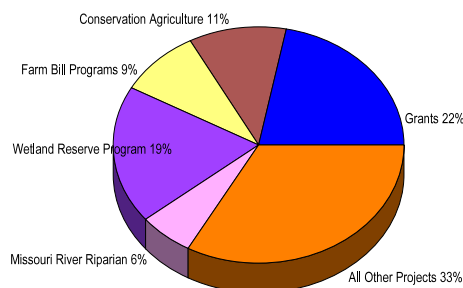
• Total Producers - 36	
• Upland Restoration	1,944.4 acres
• Upland Protection	<u>5,558.6 acres</u>
Total	7,503.0 acres

Conservation Tillage

• Total Producers - 4	
Total	8,107.7 acres

Energy Production from Biomass and Carbon Storage on Agricultural Lands - One of the strategies the Trust has used since its inception to carry out its mission is to work closely with agricultural interests finding ways that agriculture and conservation can complement each another. Potential exists for agricultural income to flow to farmers and ranchers for storing carbon on agricultural lands through use of conservation tillage practices, reestablishing grass cover on crop lands, and restoring wetlands. Trust staff has worked with producers and the scientific community to help facilitate education about this potential. In addition, attention continues to flow to alternate energy options.

Trust Expenditures in 2004



Growth of crops such as switchgrass or one of several varieties of wheatgrass for conversion to ethanol and useful byproducts has the potential to provide income to agricultural producers and conservation on thousands of acres of marginal crop land in the state. These possibilities to provide on-the-ground conservation coupled with a private economic market for the goods or practices fit well with the Trust's role in facilitating partnerships between the agricultural and conservation communities. Trust staff made tremendous progress in these areas in 2004, and the future holds prospects of this work becoming an important part of Trust activities for the next several years.

In Summary - The year of 2004 saw continuation of a "window of opportunity" for BIG PROJECTS - acquisition and long-term land protection easements. Trust staff continues to watch for opportunities in ongoing programs like our beginning farmer and pilot midterm easement program. Many farm bill programs like the Conservation Reserve Program and others remain the backbone of much of our one-on-one work with agricultural producers. But in 2004 the best opportunities to do meaningful, long-term conservation projects were found in programs like WRP, FRPP, or GRP that either placed long-term easements on property or could be used in concert with an acquisition plan that met landowner needs. We will continue to explore these types of opportunities when approached by landowners looking for conservation partners to assist them in achieving their goals for conservation on their private property.

KEITH TREGO is executive director of the North Dakota Natural Resources Trust

Beginning Farmer Program

by Terry Allbee



In 2002 the Trust created a program to assist beginning farmers with land purchases that qualify for the Bank of North Dakota's Beginning Farmer Loan Program. The concept behind the program is that sound management of private land use for agriculture is critical for the future of North Dakota agricul-

ture, and that young farmers and ranchers of today are the cornerstones of our agricultural and conservation heritage. To help these beginning farmers and ranchers get started, the Trust offers up-front cash payments for conservation practices on the proposed land acquisition. This financial assistance can be used to aggregate the down payment and make the purchase possible.

The Trust signed three new contracts in 2004 enrolling 2,255 acres in Burleigh, Mercer, and Dickey Counties. Conservation practices selected by the beginning farmers and ranchers included 1,708 acres of native grass and 547 acres of tame grass lease. Sixty-nine (69) acres will be re-seeded to tame grass. In addition, planned grazing practices will be incorporated into the producer's operation and the Trust will provide assistance for 47,620 feet of boundary fence and 19,620 feet of cross fence. The ND Game and Fish Department offered assistance to one producer who enrolled 320 acres of land into a 30-year public access agreement.

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2004 Habitat Conservation Totals

Wetlands Habitat

• Total Producers - 87	
• Wetlands Restored/Created	595.4 acres
• Wetlands Managed/Protected	<u>2,108.4 acres</u>
Total	2,703.8 acres

Associated Habitat

• Total Producers - 158	
• Uplands Restored (Native/DNC)	2,071.4 acres
• Uplands Managed/Protected	5,867.6 acres
• Conservation Tillage	<u>24,009.9 acres</u>
Total	31,948.9 acres

Confluence Lands Dedication

Set for April 29 by Merle Bennett

The Trust played a vital roll assisting the American Foundation for Wildlife's (AFW) acquisition of over 1,460 acres at the confluence of the Missouri and Yellowstone Rivers. This acquisition occurred over the past two years and involved three landowners. Partnerships for the acquisition, both in-kind services and funding, included 15 other federal, state, and local organizations in addition to Trust and AFW funding.

The acquired lands lie directly across the river(s) from Fort Buford and the new Yellowstone-Missouri Confluence Visitor Center. The acquisition will forever protect the view shed of the confluence as seen from the visitor center, as well as provide and protect excellent wildlife and fisheries habitat.

Montana and North Dakota have joined in planning a full weekend of activities celebrating the arrival of Lewis and Clark at the confluence 200 years ago. The Trust and other partners have arranged for the dedication of the acquired lands at this same time. The dedication will begin at 2:00 p.m. on April 29 and should end by 4:00 p.m. at the new visitor center, either inside or outside, depending on the weather, and is open to the public.

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Grants *(continued from page 3)*

Wahpeton Park Board, Kidder Recreation Area Arboretum Interpretive Signage: The tree signage that includes common name, photographs, scientific name, range, plant description, environmental requirements, uses, and related species plus stands have been purchased and installed through funding from the North Dakota Natural Resources Trust on the Kidder Recreation Area Arboretum. These signs are excellent environmental education training tools. The arboretum has become a popular area for citizens, including school students, to observe the diversity of native plant materials, collect leaves, make decisions on trees for their own homes, and gain other benefits. Fund-raising efforts continue to further develop this outdoor classroom along the Red River.

Life After Conservation Agriculture

by Sharon Clancy

Although the Conservation Agriculture (CA) project is winding down, elements addressed by the project are starting to take on a life of their own which will extend far beyond the project.

North Dakota has the first soil quality specialist in the nation assigned to the state office of the Natural Resources Conservation Service. Susan Samson-Liebig is beginning her work in the state by engaging the CA demonstration farmers in her plans for a long-term study of the soil quality aspects of specific farm management practices. Susan attended the spring round of Resource Analysis Team meetings to introduce her proposal, and all four farmers readily



accepted her offer. Samson-Liebig will begin her observations during this spring's growing season.

Another exciting development is the beginning of a carbon sequestration research project. This research will form the basis for wetland value as a carbon sink. Wetlands from throughout the Prairie Pothole Region and the Devils Lake Basin will be selected.

CA has also been investigating ways to reduce the cost of fuel. Nothing has come from these efforts, but we were delighted with the recent announcement by Senator Kent Conrad of a biodiesel plant to be built and operational by August of 2006. The CA project helped introduce these ideas to the Rural Electric and the Minot Development Corporation, which may have helped them see the value of Senator Conrad's proposal.

Conservation Agriculture is in the process of developing the final report. It will be released at about the time that this spring's seeding is completed. Please watch for the press release and contact the Trust for your copy of the report, which will detail the results of this innovative project.