

2006 Annual Report | *Overview*

The close of 2006 found the Trust engaged in its usual diversity of roles. As is so often the case, our activities simultaneously spanned the range from habitat creation in its most basic form, hand planting and watering trees on a Missouri River habitat restoration site, to the broadest of landscape level strategic issues, working on the 2007 Farm Bill, and considering the “gold rush” mentality of renewable energy production on the state’s and nation’s farmlands.

HABITAT RESTORATION

For the past several years, the Trust has been leading a coalition of groups working with landowners along the mainstem Missouri River, north of the communities of Bismarck and Mandan, who were interested in land protection. Several land protection easements have been accomplished utilizing US Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Farm and Ranch Protection Program. Some of this acreage is suitable for re-vegetation immediately adjacent to the river. Trust staff worked with landowners to submit a successful Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP) grant to USDA, and trees were planted on one of the land protection sites in early 2006. It was a very dry summer and survival of the new plantings hinged on watering. Most of the credit goes to Trust staffer Terry Allbee, who spent many days pumping water from the nearby Missouri to sustain the young plantings. The goal

of the landowners and the Trust is for the Missouri shoreline in the area to not only be protected but re-vegetated in a manner that will create a corridor along the river and provide future river users a pleasant view of trees lining the river’s shore.

HABITAT PROTECTION

Over the past several years, the Trust and a coalition of 15-20 partners have purchased nearly 1,500 acres of land to protect the view shed of the Confluence Visitor’s Center at the Missouri/Yellowstone Rivers confluence southwest of Williston. A third acquisition, known as the Sullivan Tract, totaling approximately 250 acres, was completed in the last days of 2006. This tract, adjacent to the Ochs Tract, has approximately 1.5 miles of Yellowstone River shoreline, a large restorable oxbow wetland, and nearly 200 acres of wooded bottom lands. Veteran Trust employee Merle Bennett expertly coordinated the acquisition, as he has done with the previous projects. The Sullivan Tract adds valuable public lands to the core area surrounding the confluence, protecting the area from development and providing valuable hunting and fishing access.

FACILITATION

Much has been spoken and written in the last few years about potential acquisition of the Eberts Ranch in North Dakota’s badlands. The property

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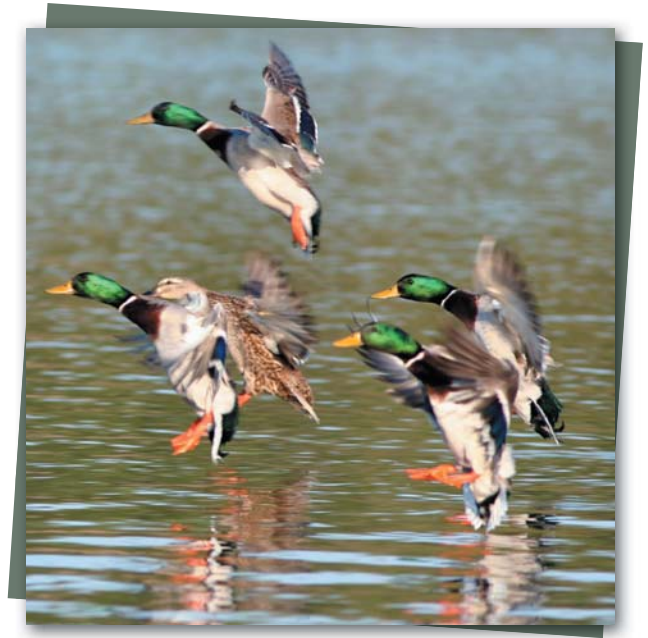
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contains lands once ranched by our conservation president, Theodore Roosevelt, and sits directly across the Little Missouri River from Theodore Roosevelt's (TR) Elkhorn Ranch site. Ridges and buttes on the Eberts property comprise much of the landscape and view TR wrote of often in his books about his time ranching and hunting in the west. The area is a national treasure and its acquisition and protection has appropriately drawn national interest. Approximately one-third of the ranch lands were purchased from the Eberts family in the fall of 2006. A Friends of the Elkhorn Ranch group was formed to assist the USDA Forest Service acquire funds to complete the acquisition. The Trust provided coordination on project strategy, fund raising, and local support. By the time you read this, it is likely the purchase of the Eberts property will have been completed and the public will be the beneficiary of this amazing project for the long term.

LONG-TERM LANDSCAPE STRATEGY

The farm bill is the defining factor on the North Dakota landscape. It affects virtually every key production agriculture decision and, with the inception of progressive conservation programs like the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) in 1985, it also affects producers' conservation options. The current array of conservation programs like the CRP, the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP), the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP), the Grassland Reserve Program (GRP), the Conservation Security Program (CSP), and others, have provided producers an array of voluntary conservation options that complement production agriculture. Since the 1996 farm bill, wildlife benefits have been a co-equal component of the CRP and wildlife habitat, and opportunities surrounding wildlife use have benefitted tremendously.

The Trust, as well as all our conservation and agricultural partners, worked continuously during 2006 on strengthening conservation provisions of the 2002 Farm Bill and laying the groundwork for the 2007 Farm Bill. The



Farm Service Agency (FSA), which administers the CRP, has been very responsive to conservation opportunities in the Prairie Pothole Region of the country. In the summer of 2006, Deputy Administrator for Farm Programs John Johnson traveled to Bismarck during the national duck symposium to announce initiation of a special Duck Nesting Practice (CP37) specifically designed to protect grass and wetland complexes in the heart of the best duck producing country in the lower 48 states. This represents one example of a successful long-term conservation strategy emanating from the farm bill.

As we wrapped up 2006 project work and looked forward to 2007, it was ever apparent that work on the 2007 Farm Bill might just be the most important project of the coming year. In that spirit the Trust will continue to work to balance voluntary conservation programs for producers, remain engaged in the important strategic discussions of growing, transporting, and processing agricultural crops for renewable energy production, and helping to shape a landscape that will sustain North Dakota's reputation for environmentally sensitive, wildlife-friendly agricultural practices.

Keith Trego is the executive director of the ND Natural Resources Trust

Grants

- by Linda Roeder

NDSU, Central Grasslands Research Extension Center (CGREC), Intensive Grazing to Enhance Beef Production and Grassland Management:

Producer awareness of the importance of monitoring rangeland health was increased through workshops, presentations, articles in the CGREC annual report, field days, and the producer mentor network during 2006. The demonstration farm was created and utilizes rotational grazing on tame and native pastures, as well as crop aftermath grazing, creep feeding, and backgrounding with forages and grains raised at the Center. Collaboration and cooperation with federal agencies and private producers will continue to be encouraged and utilized as a way of sharing information.

This year over 20 producers joined the range monitoring program setting up self-sustaining range monitoring sites. Producers picked monitoring methods that were simple, efficient, and repeatable. Future management goals were planned in accordance with the producer's goals and current resource base. The promotion of keeping good records on both grazing and production practices continues. Producers are encouraged to develop whole enterprise management systems (WEMS) on their operations and utilize nontraditional methods of extending the grazing season to reduce dependency on harvested forages.

UND School of Aerospace Sciences, Remote Wetland Landscape Profiles for Agricultural Wetland Assessment and Monitoring Project:

Development of natural resource information tools for the purpose of furthering habitat conservation continues. The resource focus is agricultural wetland landscapes and factors associated with habitat quality, such as areal extent of open water and presence/absence of vegetative strips buffering waters from agricultural run-off.

Progression in analysis of satellite imagery to effectively

delineate the areal extent of open water and intra-seasonal persistence is based upon nine years of data.

Progress has also been made toward developing tools for delineating hydric wetland vegetation communities at watershed and site-specific scales. Both hydric vegetation and water seasonality information will be integrated in a geographic information system (GIS) and used to delineate buffer strips defined as the area of perennial vegetation buffering open waters. This format will provide geographically based natural habitat and water quality data necessary for monitoring the condition of the landscape. The integration of these models will provide the opportunity to assess restored wetlands and their function as individuals and/or groups.

Additional testing will be done on private and public lands. Public outreach and education will proceed through opportunities available via the Agriculture Research Service (ARS) networks and public forums and through collaboration with the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Richland 44 School District, Abercrombie

Natural Resources Learning Center: This multi-phase project began in 2002 and ended in 2005. Completed during the project phases were wetland restoration and enhancement, prairie restoration, native prairie forest ecosystem and arboretum, and Native American medicine wheel.



Continued on page 6

Renewable Energy Update

President Bush Announces New Ethanol Goal

President Bush has set a goal of using 35 billion gallons a year and other alternative fuels by 2017, a five-fold increase over current requirements. The United States, which currently has 114 ethanol plants in operation and another 78 under construction, produced about 4.9 billion gallons of ethanol last year, according to the Renewable Fuels Association, an industry trade group. By comparison, the country consumes roughly 140 billion gallons of gasoline per year.

Push for Ethanol and Implications to CRP

Demand for corn ethanol has driven up commodity prices with subsequent increases in land rental rates and values. Current Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) rental rates are not competitive with land rental rates jeopardizing re-enrollment, extension, and new enrollment of CRP contracts. The Farm Service Agency (FSA) announced there will be no general CRP sign-ups for 2007 and 2008, and that they are considering early outs for CRP. FSA indicated the need for increased corn production to meet demand for ethanol inspired the changes for CRP.

The Trust is working with conservation and agriculture interests on strategies to maintain and enhance the wildlife value of CRP while ensuring the program is attractive to producers.

Grant Application

In early February 2007, the Trust submitted a Conservation Innovation Grant proposal to the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) related to renewable energy. If funded, the results of the project will assist producers and decision makers in designing a well-thought-out, ecologically sustainable renewable energy program that meets the needs of wildlife and producers. The objectives of the project are to:

- 1 Assess landscapes for their potential to optimize conservation, renewable energy production, and farm profitability in which no native prairie is converted and the undisturbed character of CRP is not diminished.
- 2 Assess soil erosion, soil health, and carbon sequestration across the landscape under different land use scenarios.
- 3 Target landscapes with high wetland densities, low native grass, high relative precipitation, and soil types conducive to growing energy crops. Focus on cropped wetlands with a seasonal water regime.
- 4 Identify opportunities for sustainable land use that can accommodate production agriculture while capturing dollars already spent on farm programs.
- 5 Develop an agriculture producer decision support tool that compares economics of different land use scenarios that prioritize renewable energy production and also optimize production agriculture and conservation.

The NRCS will announce grant award recipients in May 2007.



Photo by Tom Stromme

Karen Kreil and Don Larson of the governor's staff discuss alternative energy during Renewable Energy Day at the Capitol.

ND Renewable Energy Day

The ND Renewable Energy Partnership sponsored “Renewable Energy Day” on January 19, 2007, in the Great Hall of the State Capitol building. Members of the Partnership, including the Trust, staffed information booths on various renewable energy issues. The Trust booth discussed the benefits of using prairie grass for ethanol production, including carbon storage, reduced soil and water erosion, reduced green house gas emissions, positive energy input/output ratio, and good wildlife habitat. A news conference was also held by a bipartisan group of legislators to announce introduction of Senate Bill 2288, a comprehensive renewable energy bill. Information on this bill and other renewable energy related bills is provided below.

2007 ND Legislative Session

A total of 25 bills have been introduced by the Legislature dealing with a variety of renewable energy issues, and the following provides an overview of two bills of interest to the Trust.

SB2288: Called for a biomass energy center; renewable energy policy, council, and development fund for installation of geothermal, solar, or wind energy devices; contained provisions for ethanol and renewable energy incentives, expansion of the biodiesel partnership in assisting community expansion program, and distribution of motor vehicle registration fees, and the agriculture investment tax credit; and provided a continuing appropriation of \$7 million per fiscal year (\$3 million per biennium) from the resources trust fund and \$17 million from the general fund for assistance in research, development, and marketing of renewable energy sources necessary to meet goals, and \$5 million for deposit in the biofuels partnership in assisting community expansion fund.

Following the Senate hearing, the bill was substantially modified. The \$20 million was cut to \$3 million from the general fund, with authority to leverage an additional \$17 million for a renewable energy grant fund within the Industrial Commission for projects promoting North Dakota

produced energy, including biodiesel, biomass, coal, ethanol, geothermal, hydroelectric, hydrogen, natural gas, oil, solar, and wind. The renewable energy council was changed to create an Energy Independence Research Council and to include members from the Lignite Council and Oil and Gas Council. The bill establishes a biomass energy center at NDSU. The bill passed in the Senate on February 9 on a 42-3 vote and referred to the House Natural Resources Committee where a hearing was held March 1. No action had been taken as of March 8, 2007.

HB1515: Establishes a biomass incentive and research program and a private lands open to sportsmen (PLOTS) biomass demonstration project and provides a \$2.5 million appropriation. The bill passed in the House on February 14 on a 57-36 vote and will be heard in the Senate Natural Resources Committee on Thursday, March 8, 2007.

Karen Kreil is a biologist for the ND Natural Resources Trust

2006 Habitat Accomplishments

Wetlands

Total Producers - 82	
Wetlands Restored/Created	486.5 acres
Wetlands Managed/Protected	2,756.8 acres

Totals 3,243.3 acres

Uplands

Total Producers - 47	
Uplands Restored (Native/DNC)	1,106.6 acres
Uplands Managed/Protected	6,632.1 acres

Totals 7,738.7 acres

Grants *(Continued from page 3)*

The final phase was the installation of a pathway around the park and cedar benches along the east and west sides. Benches were also placed in the center of the medicine wheel.

Sheyenne James Resource Conservation and Development Council, Nonpoint Source Pollution Best Management Practice (BMP) Team:

The purpose of the 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 the priority areas. The Sheyenne James RC&D Council, Inc., provided engineering assistance to 27 water quality best management practice projects in 2006. They assisted with the installation of 24 animal waste systems, three surveys, and 12 preliminary and 12 final designs for animal waste systems. Two riparian restoration projects were surveyed and had preliminary and final designs completed in the Sheyenne River Watershed.

Gateway to Science, Earth Wellness

Environmental Festival: The seventh annual Environmental Festival was held at Bismarck State College on March 15, 2006. The festival provided hands-on environmental science activities for fifth grade students and was offered in two sessions – one morning and one afternoon. Forty-three teachers participated, with an additional 28 chaperones and a total of 870 fifth grade students representing Burleigh, Emmons, McLean, Morton, and Wells Counties. Thirty-three presenters offered 22 different sessions on various aspects of the environment – eight containing a significant discussion regarding habitats.

Wells County Soil Conservation District, Composting Demonstration Project: The objective of this project was to demonstrate and transfer

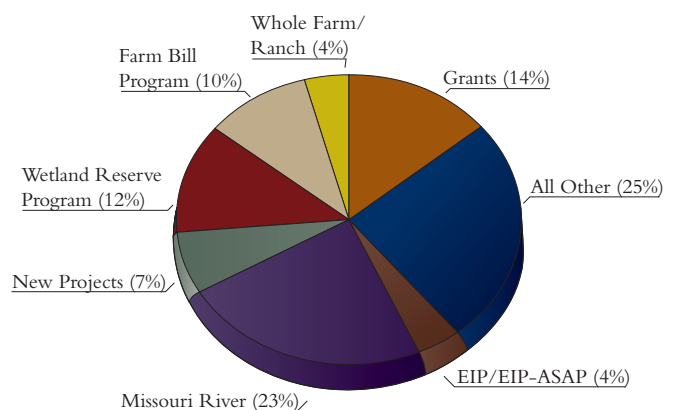
the practice of composting livestock manure to producers through three phases. An introduction/education phase of group meetings and one-on-one consultations with producers took place during the winter of 2005-2006.

The demonstration phase took place during the summer of 2006 on four feedlot sites. Temperatures of the piles, manure analysis before and after composting, time spent turning the windrows, and volume reduction were recorded at each site.

Nearly 50 people attended a public tour of three sites in August 2006. Several producers expressed interest in participating in the project and adopting the practice of composting manure from their feedlots. The four demonstration sites will continue the practice.

Wells County SCD will host a meeting in February 2007 for producers to sign agreements for participation and incentive payments. A nutrient management plan will be written for each participant.

Trust Expenditures 2006



Field & Stream

Heroes of Conservation Award

Dick Kroger, chairman of the North Dakota Natural Resources Trust (Trust) board of directors, was the recipient of the Field & Stream Heroes of Conservation Award for the week of 22 January 2007. The award is presented by Toyota to recognize sportsmen dedicated to the protection of fish and wildlife. In September 2007, Field & Stream will hold its second annual heroes of conservation awards ceremony to recognize these heroes.



Dick retired in 1994 after a 30-year career as a fish and wildlife biologist for various federal agencies. Since then he has volunteered his time to many conservation projects in Minnesota. He is active in lobbying for various conservation issues on the state and federal level. Dick also teaches wildlife and habitat management to local students and has authored the book, *Choosing a Conservation Vocation or a Bureaucratic Career*. Dick has served as the National Wildlife Federation's representative on the Trust board since 1995.

Congratulations, Dick!



Visit the ND Natural Resources Trust web site at www.ndnrt.com to read the 2006–2010 Strategic Plan.

The ND Chapter of The Wildlife Society 2007 Habitat Award

The 2007 Habitat Award was presented to the American Foundation for Wildlife (AFW) at the North Dakota Chapter of The Wildlife Society annual awards banquet in Mandan, North Dakota, on February 8, 2007. This award is presented to an individual or group that has made a substantial contribution toward preserving or establishing high quality wildlife habitat in the state. The AFW is a nonprofit organization in Bismarck that partners with local, state, and federal agencies, as well as local sporting and wildlife clubs and organizations to provide funding for wildlife conservation projects. President Pete Ressler and Board Members Karen Hagel and Vern Axtman accepted the award.

Future newsletters will appear in the North Dakota Water magazine.

North Dakota Natural Resources Trust



Habitat Trunks Delight Teachers and Students Throughout North Dakota

In 2003 Education Team members distributed free wildlife habitat trunks to every North Dakota school with a fourth-grade classroom. The purpose of this project was to provide North Dakota's young people with an opportunity to explore and discover the habitats and wildlife that surround them, while complementing the existing North Dakota Studies Curriculum currently used at the fourth-grade level.

The trunks are stuffed with mammal skulls and skins, big game animal hide pieces, wildlife track and plant replicas, a grouse wing, turtle shell, wildlife and habitat photos, plant identification cards, several posters featuring species found in the state, wildlife activities, craft projects, and maps. There is also a North Dakota Wildlife Habitat Educator's Guide - the resource items are used to reinforce concepts taught from the educator's guide. They provide students with hands-on materials, which are such a benefit in the learning process.

Partnership grants were a huge part of completing this project. The Education Team was fortunate to enlist support from the North Dakota Natural Resources Trust and three state agencies - Game and Fish Department, Department of Public Instruction, and the Health Department. Other partners were the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, NoDak Sportsmen's Club, the state chapter of The Wildlife Society, and Prairie Pothole Partners. Without these dedicated partners, this project would not have happened.

The wildlife trunk and habitat educator's guide project is ongoing. The Education Team prepares annual updates to send to the teachers. Recently, a partnership with the North Dakota Game and Fish Department enabled the Team to provide habitat videos on wetlands, prairie, riparian areas, and woodlands. Other updates have included a native plant herbarium, plant guide, shorebird CD, and wildlife identification cards.

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