



FISH & WILDLIFE SERVICE

Bulletin

U.S. Department of the Interior

December 1993

Three feature releases report on progress at Chase Lake, ND, Quill Lakes, Saskatchewan, Canada, and Pickerel Creek, Ohio, launched as North American Waterfowl Management Plan "flagship" projects." All rely on a pooling of funds and expertise by a wide range of public and private partners, supported by grants through the North American Wetlands Conservation Act. Since the Act was passed in 1989, it has provided \$97.7 million as a match for \$187 million in partnership funds for 260 projects in the U.S., Canada, and Mexico.

The North American Waterfowl Management Plan:

It's for the Birds ... in Ohio

"This is one government project that actually took less time and less money than originally predicted," says Gildo Tori, Wetlands Project Leader of the Ohio Division of Wildlife in describing the restoration of wetlands along the shores of Lake Erie on Sandusky Bay.

"Not only that, but the response by wildlife and people has been equally swift and positive," he says. "We're seeing thousands of shorebirds and ducks, hundreds of songbirds and wading birds, and we've counted 2,000 plants of the threatened eastern prairie fringed orchid, where before we found only a dozen. And to cap it all off, a bald eagle pair built a nest in the heart of the project. But what makes it really special is its attraction for people. We're seeing a five-fold increase in the number of visitors who come to enjoy the wildlife."

Tori is describing the 2,106-acre Pickerel Creek Wildlife Management Area on western Lake Erie, near Fremont, Ohio, where a coalition of

conservationists has recovered 1,070 acres of wetlands from what was once cropland. Adjacent to Sandusky Bay, the largest staging area in the Mississippi Flyway for black ducks on their southward migration, Pickerel Creek was named a "flagship project" of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan. The Plan is an international commitment among Canada, Mexico, and the U.S. to restore the continent's waterfowl and wetland resources.

"We acquired Pickerel Creek when it became available in the mid-1980s," Tori said, "but didn't have the money to restore it from cropland back to wetlands. We figured it would cost about \$6 million and take 10 years. But then the North American Wetlands Conservation Act was passed and, with its partnership approach, we were able to complete the restoration for \$2 million in just three years."

The partners include Ducks Unlimited, Ohio Plan Clubs, Maumee Valley Audubon Society, Lake Erie Wildfowlers, the Wildlife Legislative Fund of America, together with the Ohio Division of Wildlife who pooled \$956,000 and obtained grants of \$750,000 from the North American Wetlands Conservation Fund. The completed project was dedicated in October.

"We're seeing thousands of birds where before there was only a handful," says Tori. "It's more rewarding than I can describe."

"That's what it's all about -- when the birds and other wetland species come back," says Robert Streeter, who coordinates both the North American Waterfowl Management Plan and the complementary North American Wetlands Conservation Fund for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. "It's like finding hidden treasure."

X X X

For more information, contact Inez Connor 202-219-3861 or
Gildo Tori 419-898-0960

The North American Waterfowl Management Plan:

It's for the Birds...in the Chase Lake Prairie Project, North Dakota

"One of these days, I'm going to take my 'bit of dirt' back to the Chase Lake Prairie Project and help restore a wetland," says Sheila Tooze, Environmental Officer at the Canadian Embassy in Washington, DC.

Like hundreds of others across this country and Canada, she received a small container of the rich prairie pothole soil from North Dakota in September 1989 with an invitation to the official dedication of this flagship project under the North American Waterfowl Management Plan. She was unable to accept the invitation to "bring back the dirt" and help restore a wetland, but, "Someday," she says. The North American Plan is an international commitment among Canada, Mexico, and the United States to restore the continent's waterfowl and wetland resources.

Because of its strategic location and importance as breeding grounds for the continent's waterfowl and shorebirds, the Chase Lake Prairie Project was one of the first major joint venture projects established under the North American Plan to try to reverse serious declines in wetlands, associated uplands, and related waterfowl populations.

The project set ambitious goals to achieve in the first 5 years under a 39-item action plan. Primary emphasis is on restoring and enhancing prairie ecosystems on public and private lands, and predation management to improve nesting success by migratory and resident ground-nesting birds.

Now, approaching the 5-year mark next fall, the flagship project is "on track and on target" in addressing the 39 action items, according to Project Manager Steve Kresl. "We've been very successful on a lot of fronts, but we still have a long way to go."

Goals have been exceeded on many items in the action plan, nearly half of which benefit endangered species, and the response by migratory birds has also exceeded expectations. For example, 14 American avocet nests were counted in 1993 on one small, created nesting island where none had been before, predator exclosures have yielded higher nesting success rates in waterfowl and endangered piping plovers, and rotational grazing and delayed haying with landowner incentives have demonstrated that managing the land for wildlife is compatible with agriculture.

"One of the most significant accomplishments, in my view, is the 700 agreements we've signed with landowners for wildlife-related projects," says Kresl. "When all is said and done, that's where the future of wildlife lies."

Headquartered about 15 miles northwest of Medina, North Dakota, the Chase Lake Prairie Project is "the best of the best" in the heart of the finest duck producing area remaining in the Nation. Three to four million ducks breed in North Dakota and millions of ducks, geese, swans, cranes, and other birds use the habitat during spring and fall migration. The area also provides important breeding habitat for the endangered piping plover and other rare birds such as LeConte's and Baird's sparrows, and migration rest stops for whooping cranes, peregrine falcons, and bald eagles. Bands placed on birds in North Dakota have been recovered in 46 states, 10 Canadian provinces, and 22 other countries.

"The progress we've made has been largely due to the cooperation we've received from private landowners and our other partners," says Kresl. "The project been helped by two grants from the North American Wetlands Conservation Fund--one for \$87,080 and another for \$198,000. We hope to qualify for more and even larger grants in the future, but it's difficult to raise the required match to qualify for the grant."

The North American Wetlands Conservation Act was passed in 1989 to support the North American Plan and other wetlands-related projects. It requires a one-to-one match of non-Federal dollars.

"That's tough in this part of the country that is sparsely populated and has no large corporate presence," worries Kresl. "We can only hope that others from across the country who enjoy the sight and sound of the songbirds, shorebirds, and waterfowl produced in these prairies will realize they have a stake in what we do here."

Robert Streeter, coordinator of both the North American Plan and the North American Wetlands Conservation Fund for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, agrees. "We cannot overstate the importance of this area to our migratory birds--songbirds, neotropicals, shorebirds, whooping cranes, bald eagles, ducks, geese, and swans," he says. "But we need a sense of urgency, of renewal, and expansion of powerful partnerships to help preserve this prairie heritage for all citizens of North America."

The commitment to "return my bit of dirt to Chase Lake," is driven by the wish to "give something back for the enjoyment the birds give me," says Tooze.

Maybe that "someday" will come next September, when the Chase Lake Prairie Project observes its 5th anniversary. And in the meantime, maybe others, including new partners, will also make a commitment.

X X X

For more information, contact Inez Connor, 202-219-3861 or Steve Kresl, 701-752-4218.

The North American Waterfowl Management Plan:

It's For the Birds...in the Quill Lakes, Saskatchewan

With its rolling fields of wheat, farm yards, and grain elevators, the Quill Lakes area of Saskatchewan is typical of the Canadian prairie landscape.

But, as typical as it may seem upon first encounter, Quill Lakes stands out as one of the most important achievements of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan. The Plan is an international commitment among Canada, Mexico, and the U.S. to restore the continent's waterfowl and wetland resources.

"Migratory birds that nest here are shared by provinces and states across the continent," comments Bob Carles, general manager of the Saskatchewan Wetland Conservation Corporation that administers the Plan in the province. "The agencies that are working toward wetland management in Saskatchewan are really working on behalf of all North Americans."

This area is one of North America's most important nesting and production areas for ducks. Quill Lakes-bred waterfowl fan out along every continental flyway - Pacific, Central, Mississippi, and Atlantic - reaching virtually every corner of the continent. It is a key staging area for geese, sandhill cranes, many species of arctic-nesting shorebirds, and one of the single most important breeding sites in interior North America for the endangered piping plover.

"There's an inherent responsibility to secure this valuable resource for the future," says Carles. "The fact that the Quill Lakes are so important to North America's wetland birds has definitely helped focus attention on protecting and conserving it."

Its significance to the continent's migratory birds was recognized by the North American Plan and one of its complementary funding source, the North American Wetlands Conservation Act of 1989. Both measures call for a partnership approach, including participation by U.S. public and private organizations in support of Canadian projects. This partnership approach preceded the Act and began in 1988 at Quill Lakes as a "first step" flagship project involving several State wildlife agencies, Ducks Unlimited, and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation who pooled and matched resources to reclaim lost prairie wetlands.

Partnerships have become the hallmark of both the North American Plan and the Act. Across Canada, for example, since the Act was passed partners have pooled \$39 million of their funds with another \$30 million from the Canadian government and have secured matching grants of \$40 million through the North American Wetlands Conservation Act. These combined funds and shared expertise have been at work on 134 wetlands projects throughout Canada.

Plan activities on the prairies focus mainly on encouraging land-use practices that more adequately conserve soil, water, and wildlife habitat. In a socio-economic study done in the Quills area in October 1992, farmers felt the Plan's land-use programs offered adequate and reasonable compensation to landowners, are the best use of the land, and are good farming practices.

"Landowner acceptance of conservation farming practices, encouraged by North American Plan partners, is creating thousands of acres of new nesting habitat in the area," said Carles. "This change in attitude is our most significant accomplishment, for it is long-lasting, permanent protection."

The land management programs being carried out at Quill Lakes also help maintain North America's biodiversity. In addition to waterfowl, the area

offers refuge to a variety of other rare, threatened, or endangered birds, including white pelicans, whooping cranes, peregrine falcons, and some 300 nesting piping plovers.

Receding water levels have literally left the plovers "high and dry" as they continued to nest on the original shoreline, miles from what is now the edge of the lake. To reduce high chick mortality, wells were drilled close to the nesting areas. The water trickles out over the mudflat, forming rivulets and small pools to provide water for the birds. Large areas of shoreline have been fenced off to prevent cattle damage to nesting habitat.

An agriculture-based province, Saskatchewan has lost 75 percent of its native grasslands and an estimated 40 percent of its prairie wetlands to agricultural practices. Half of these remaining wetlands are threatened by industry and agriculture. The long-term decline in duck numbers is directly attributed to this reduced quantity and quality of wetland habitat and the accompanying vulnerability to predators.

The loss of nesting cover, in particular, is responsible for an extremely low hatch rate of about one in 10, but this is improved significantly where habitat is managed to provide good, secure nesting cover. Protecting these areas and establishing nesting cover not only helps ducks but also benefits upland species such as LeConte's sparrows, clay-colored sparrows, savannah sparrows, and sedge wrens.

Habitat quality for other wetland and upland migratory birds also has been improved throughout the area, including flooding hundreds of acres with dozens of miles of shoreline, building dikes, converting cultivated land to valuable nesting cover, and securing land through purchases, leases, and management agreements.

"The Quill Lakes project serves as an example of the effectiveness of the Plan at work," says Robert Streeter, coordinator of both the North American Plan and the North American Wetlands Conservation Fund for the U.S. the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. "The results are there for analysis -- in the number of acres protected and developed and in the subsequent increase in migratory bird productivity and biological diversity. The accomplishments at Quill Lakes are benefitting all the people of North America, today and in the future."

X X X

For more information, contact Inez Connor 202-219-3861 or
Rick Bates 306-787-0726
Photos available

-end-



FISH & WILDLIFE SERVICE

Bulletin

U.S. Department of the Interior

December 1993

The following short items report on the return of wildlife and vegetation after restoration of wetland habitats under the North American Waterfowl Management Plan. All are accomplished through a variety of public and private partnerships, with funding support from the complementary North American Wetlands Conservation Act, which requires a 1:1 funding match. Since 1990, the Act has provided \$97.7 million to be pooled with partner funds of \$187 million for 260 projects in the U.S., Canada, and Mexico. Complete feature articles are available on those marked with an asterisk. For more information, contact Inez Connor, 202-219-3861.

NORTH AMERICAN WATERFOWL MANAGEMENT PLAN...

It's for the Birds

*Caddo Lake, Texas -- A Wetlands of International Importance. Dedicated October 23, 1993, Caddo Lake became the 13th site in the United States to be placed on the "List of Wetlands of International Importance" under the Ramsar Convention, named after the host-city in Iran. This latest recognition of the unique Caddo Lake wetland ecosystem in East Texas resulted from a grassroots campaign led by entertainer Don Henley, a native of the area. Donations by the Texas Nature Conservancy and matching grants of \$1.9 million each from the North American Wetlands Conservation Fund and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department made it possible for the State of Texas to acquire the 8,000-acre site.
Contact: Hans Stuart 505-766-3940

*Chase Lake Prairie Project, ND. Now, approaching the 5-year mark next fall, the project is "on track and on target" in addressing the 39 items outlined in its action plan in 1988, according to Project Leader Steve Kresl. "We've been very successful on a lot of fronts, but we still have a long way to go."

Goals have been exceeded on many items in the action plan, nearly half of which benefit endangered species, and the response by wildlife has also exceeded expectations. For example, 14 avocet nests were counted in 1993 on one small, created nesting island where none had been before, predator exclosures have yielded higher nesting success rates in waterfowl and endangered piping plovers, and rotational grazing and delayed haying with landowner incentives have demonstrated that managing the land for wildlife is compatible with agriculture.

"One of the most significant accomplishments, in my view, is the 700 agreements we've signed with landowners for wildlife-related projects," says Kresl. "When all is said and done, that's where the future of wildlife lies."

Contact: Steve Kresl 701-752-4218

*Quill Lakes, Saskatchewan, Canada. Land management programs carried out at Quill Lakes help maintain North America's diversity. One such program is designed to reduce high mortality in piping plover chicks. Receding water levels have literally left the plovers "high and dry" as they continued to nest on the original shoreline, miles from what is now the edge of the lake. Wells were drilled close to the nesting areas. The water trickles out over the mudflat, forming rivulets and small pools to provide water for the birds. Large areas of shoreline also have been fenced off to prevent cattle damage to nesting habitat.

North American Waterfowl Management Plan activities on the prairies focus mainly on encouraging land-use practices that more adequately conserve soil, water, and wildlife habitat. In a socio-economic study done in the Quills area in October 1992, farmers felt the Plan's land-use programs offered adequate and reasonable compensation to landowners, are the best use of the land, and are good farming practices. "Landowner acceptance of conservation farming practices, encouraged by North American Plan partners, is creating thousands of acres of new nesting habitat in the area," said Bob Carles, general manager of the Saskatchewan Wetland Conservation Corporation that manages the Plan in the province. "This change in attitude is our most significant accomplishment, for it is long-lasting, permanent protection." (Photos available) Contact: Rick Bates 306-787-0726

Cape May National Wildlife Refuge, NJ. Dedicated as a "flagship" project in May 1989, the Cape May National Wildlife Refuge has since acquired 6,200 acres, most along Delaware Bay, the second largest and most important shorebird migration site in North America. The bay spartina marshes are also important wintering areas for black ducks and the forest and fields to the east provide valuable habitat for migrating raptors, woodcock, and neotropical bird species. More than a third of the way towards acquiring its proposed 16,700 acres, the refuge is an important link in the "greenways" chain, connecting with lands acquired by the Cape May County Open Space/Farmland Preservation Programs and the New Jersey Department of Fish, Game, and Wildlife. Contact: Steve Atzert 609-463-0994

Heron Lake, MN. Once habitat for hundreds of thousands of canvasbacks and other duck and waterbird species, Heron Lake has been severely degraded in the last 90 years by extensive pumping and diking, soil erosion, and fertilizer and chemical runoff. Since 1989, local interest in restoring Heron Lake and improving water quality throughout the watershed has led to North American Plan partnerships and funding support from the North American Wetlands Conservation Fund to construct a state-of-the-art electric fish barrier to exclude carp, black bullhead, and other problem, bottom-feeding fish; a surface water quality testing program; protection of 2,000 acres of important wildlife habitat; restoration of 100 wetlands and improving another 200-acre wetland complex; and mapping the watershed in a computerized geographic information system.

Kellys Slough Wildlife Project, ND. "We're seeing a sharp increase in the types and numbers of wading and shorebird species using the Kellys Slough area," says Mick Erickson, Manager of the Kellys Slough National Wildlife Refuge, located 10 miles west of Grand Forks, North Dakota.

"Great egrets, eared grebes, semipalmated and black-bellied plovers, least sandpipers, lesser yellowlegs, and Wilson's phalaropes are just a few of the numerous species benefitting from the project," according to Erickson.

Although the refuge has long been established, there had never been money for significant wetland improvements until the North American Waterfowl Management Plan. "A majority of the area drained and dried up each year, leaving little water for wildlife production," says Erickson. "But now, with the help of our partners and a matching grant from the North American Wetlands Conservation Fund, six earthen dikes and water control structures have been constructed and are enhancing 593 wetland acres. We've seen an increase in pintail, mallard, canvasback, and Canada goose production." The refuge is also providing valuable year-round habitat for migratory and resident birds, including rare sightings of a tricolored heron and black-necked stilt in 1993. "We're also seeing an increase in the number of birdwatchers, hikers, and other wildlife enthusiasts visiting the area every day."

Contact: Mick Erickson 701-662-8611

DU and NAWMP Receive a \$3 Million Donation. The Hofmann Foundation of Concord, California, has made the largest donation ever received on behalf of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan by Ducks Unlimited. The funds are earmarked as a "leadership" donation for DU's VALLEY CARE program in Central Valley Joint Venture. VALLEY CARE focuses on developing, restoring, and enhancing wetlands and agricultural habitat on privately owned lands throughout the Central Valley of California. Begun in March 1993, VALLEY CARE (Conservation of Agriculture, Resources, Environment) will benefit California's biological diversity by improving habitat for many types of wildlife, including endangered species, shorebirds, and waterfowl and will contribute substantially to achieving the objectives of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan. DU has been actively involved in all phases of the Plan since its inception.

Contact: Alan Wentz, Ducks Unlimited 916-363-8257

Also in California. Sacramento Job Corps Partners with Plan.** An unusual partnership among the Sacramento Job Corps, the National Audubon Society, and the Sacramento County Regional Sanitation District is restoring and enhancing wildlife habitat in the Stone Lakes National Wildlife Refuge area that could eventually provide a 13-mile contiguous corridor of wetland and other high-value wildlife habitats. The Job Corps is a vocational training program for young adults from economically disadvantaged families.

Over a mile of Morrison Creek, returned to its former meandering channel, will now course through a 140-acre native grassland, a riparian restoration project, and a 165-acre wetland complex known as Upper Beach Lake, providing habitat for waterfowl and wetland species as well as for riparian and grassland species. The unusual partnership is also expanding the riparian forest corridor along two nearby creeks and creating a valley oak and interior live oak woodland savannah on a major portion of the upland area. (**The project received funding from the Central Valley Joint Venture, not the North American Wetlands Fund.)

Contact: Tom Harvey, Stone Lakes NWR 916-978-4420
National Audubon Society 916-481-5332

X X X