

# Tewaukon

*National Wildlife Refuge*

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*Summary of the  
Comprehensive Conservation Plan*

## Where the Prairie Meets the Sky

The Tewaukon National Wildlife Refuge Complex lies in the tallgrass prairie ecosystem. The tallgrass prairie once covered an estimated 190 million acres and stretched from southern Texas to southern Manitoba. The prairie was dominated by tall grasses including big bluestem, switchgrass, Indian grass, and prairie cordgrass. Wildflowers were plentiful and bloomed from early spring into late fall. The early spring color of blue-eyed grass turned to the orange of the prairie lily of early summer. Late summer brought on a dazzling display of purple blazing stars and gave way to the bright yellow of Maximilian sunflower, and the delicate white petals of ladies tresses in the fall. This sea of grass was frequently interrupted by a large number of wetlands in a variety of sizes. The plants associated with the wetlands added to the area's vegetative diversity. Over 300 species of plants made up this ecosystem. Today, only 1 percent of this habitat remains.

## Boundless Wildlife

This enormous expanse of prairie, dotted with shimmering wetlands, provided habitat to a vast number of birds and animals. Large herds of bison and elk grazed on the lush grasses while antelope and mule deer fed on woody shrubs. Along the river bottoms and lake shores a few white-tailed deer could be found. Large carnivores, including wolves and grizzlies, followed the large grazing herds. Coyotes hunted and scavenged for jackrabbits and mice. Badgers dug tirelessly after pocket gophers and ground squirrels. Male sharp-tailed grouse courted females with elaborate dances. Colorful butterflies flitted from flower-to-flower while bobolinks sang from the tallest grasses. Along the wetland edges, upland sandpipers searched for insects and muskrats cut cattails for their huts. Waterfowl nested in the dense grasses and fed on an abundance of aquatic insects. During the spring and the fall the skies were full of family groups, long V's, and tightly bunched flocks of waterfowl, shorebirds, cranes and other migratory birds.

## Changes in Land Use and Wildlife Species

With the advent of European settlement much of the prairie was planted to agricultural crops and wetlands were drained and filled. Many of the prairie-dependent wildlife species including bison, elk, mule deer, antelope, grizzly bear, and wolves that historically used the area were either pushed out, hunted to extinction or severely reduced. Many of the other prairie and wetland birds and animals exist today on fragments of what once was an expansive and dynamic ecosystem. The prairie evolved with frequent disturbances including fire, grazing, drought, flooding, and severe climatic events. As the prairies were settled, fire was suppressed, and grazing patterns changed. As a result many nonnative plant species (leafy spurge, Kentucky bluegrass, and smooth brome) invaded and successfully out-competed the native plants.

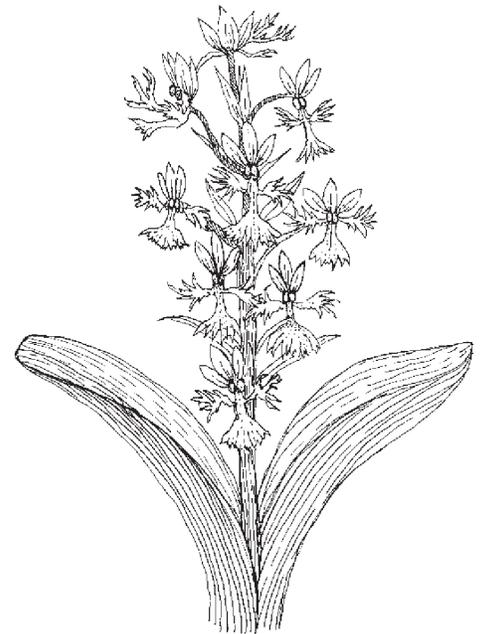
## A Place for Wildlife

The Tewaukon National Wildlife Refuge Complex is located in the southeast corner of North Dakota. The Complex includes the Tewaukon National Wildlife Refuge and the Tewaukon Wetland Management District. The Complex lies on the gently rolling glacial till plain of the Prairie Pothole Region and the Red River of the North Valley. Its flat to rolling topography is interspersed with wetlands of various sizes and depths.

The Refuge was established in 1945 as "... a refuge and breeding ground for migratory birds and other wildlife..." is 8,363 acres in size, and located in Sargent County. The Tewaukon Wetland Management District was established in 1960 as a management unit for migratory birds. The District is comprised of Waterfowl Production Areas (fee title), wetland easements, and grassland easements in Ransom, Richland, and Sargent counties. The Tewaukon Complex staff administers over 14,000 acres of Waterfowl Production Areas, over 35,000 wetland acres protected by easements, and over 10,000 acres of grassland easements within the District for wildlife.

## Valuable Refuge and District Resources

The Complex has four key habitats that provide the food, water, shelter, and space for hundreds of wildlife species. The wetlands in this region are among the continent's most biologically productive systems. Wetlands provide important migration and breeding habitat for waterfowl and shorebirds, and are home to leopard frogs, painted turtles, mink, muskrats and a variety of aquatic invertebrates. Tallgrass prairie remnants are some of the last remaining habitat for nesting and migrating grassland birds, rare butterflies, and other prairie wildlife. Other grassland habitats furnish winter cover for resident wildlife and cover for ground nesting birds and other grassland species. Three major rivers are located in the Tewaukon Complex: the Wild Rice, Sheyenne, and the Red River of the North. Only the Wild Rice River, which flows through the Tewaukon Refuge, is on Complex lands. The riparian habitat associated with these three rivers, smaller creeks and around large wetlands provide breeding and migration areas for many species of birds and mammals. The Tewaukon Complex also has unique and important values for people. Wildlife, habitat, scenery, recreation, and cultural history all combine to make the Complex a national treasure.



*Western Prairie Fringed Orchid*  
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## A Vision for the Future

In 1997, the National Wildlife Refuge Improvement Act was passed instructing all refuges in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's National Wildlife Refuge System to produce and implement a Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) that will direct their activities for the next 15 years. This CCP describes: 1) Tewaukon Complex purposes, 2) fish, wildlife, and plant populations and their habitats; 3) archaeological and cultural values; 4) significant fish, wildlife, and plant problems; and 5) the actions necessary to correct them. The CCP was developed with public input regarding issues and management. The CCP sets goals and objectives based on Complex purposes, Federal laws, NWR System goals, and FWS policies, and public input. The CCP is a blueprint that should provide management continuity on Complex lands so they continue to benefit wildlife and people. The CCP was prepared to achieve the following vision for the Tewaukon Complex.

- ✓ Tewaukon National Wildlife Refuge Complex will be preserved, managed, and enhanced as a part of the tallgrass prairie wetland ecosystem capable of supporting migratory birds and other native wildlife and plants for the benefit of present and future generations. The Complex will provide an environment where a diversity of native tallgrass prairie, wetlands, plants, wildlife, and their natural processes can be observed and explored. It will provide a place where people can learn about wildlife and their habitats and enjoy wildlife-dependent recreation.

## Tewaukon Complex Goals

To achieve the vision, five major Complex goals were developed. The goals are supported by a series of objectives and implementation strategies. The goals are:

- Preserve, restore, and enhance the ecological diversity of native flora, other grasslands and wetlands within the tallgrass prairie wetland ecosystem.
- Preserve, restore, and enhance the ecological diversity and abundance of migratory birds and other native wildlife with emphasis on waterfowl, grassland, and wetland-dependent birds.
- Contribute to the preservation and restoration of endangered, threatened, rare, and unique flora and fauna that occur, or have historically occurred in the Complex area.
- Provide recreational and educational opportunities for persons of all abilities to learn about and enjoy the tallgrass prairie wetland ecosystem, the fish and wildlife found there, and the history of the Complex in a safe and compatible manner.
- Promote partnerships to preserve, restore, and enhance a diverse, healthy, and productive prairie/wetland ecosystem in which the Tewaukon Complex plays a key role.

## Planned Accomplishments of the CCP

Achieving these goals will result in the following major accomplishments in the Complex over the next 15 years (includes implementation of the Drift Prairie and Wetland Enhancement Projects and the Dakota Tallgrass Prairie Project):

### *Habitat:*

- Protection of the remaining tracts of tallgrass prairie in the District with grassland easements, cooperative agreements, or fee title acquisition (approximately 60,000 acres).
- Enhancement of 3,716 acres of existing native prairie areas on Complex lands by reducing nonnative plants and increasing the abundance and the number of native plant species.
- Management of nine prairie focus areas utilizing the Tallgrass Prairie Management Approach to benefit migratory grassland birds, rare butterflies, and other prairie wildlife.
- Management of vegetative structure and species composition on other grasslands on the Complex to provide for the needs of grassland nesting birds.
- Restoration of 1,000 acres of old dense nesting cover (DNC), invasive nonnative grasses, and crop fields to a diverse native plant community on Complex lands.
- Utilize prescribed fire on approximately 5,000 acres of grasslands and 200 acres of wetlands annually to accomplish habitat management objectives. Protect life, property, and other resources from wildfire by safely suppressing all wildfires on Complex lands.

- Enhancement of 38 managed Refuge wetlands to mimic natural cycles and reduce nonnative wetland plants. Improve the water quality in the Wild Rice River as it enters the Refuge by restoring wetlands and adding vegetative buffer strips.
- Protection of wetlands on private land through fee title acquisition, easements, or cooperative agreements.
- Enhancement of wetlands by implementing low impact agricultural practices on surrounding uplands, grazing systems, repairing water management structures, and placing waterfowl nesting structures on private land.
- Restoration and creation of wetlands on private land.
- Inventory and monitoring of habitat to ensure needs of wildlife are being met.

**Wildlife:**

- Improvement of waterfowl nesting success on the Refuge and six Waterfowl Production Areas.
- Maintenance of 135 acres of Refuge cropland as food for migratory birds and resident wildlife.
- Reduction of detrimental nonnative wildlife on the Complex through habitat management and direct removal.
- Minimize wildlife disturbance by limiting public access and activity at certain times of the year.
- Inventory and monitoring of wildlife to provide information on trends and uses of Complex lands.
- Maintain populations of rare wildlife and plants on Complex lands and work with other agencies, groups, and landowners to protect and enhance habitat for North Dakota's rare wildlife and plants.

**Cultural Resources:**

- Gather more information on the cultural resources on the Complex. Provide additional interpretation and protection of these resources.

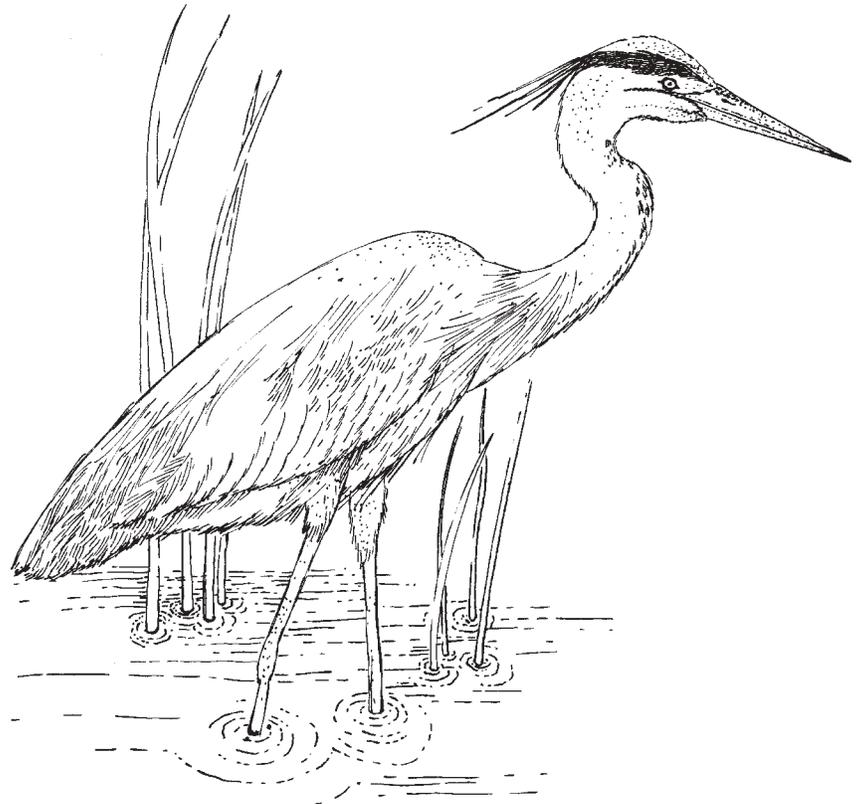
**Public Use/Recreation and Environmental Education:**

- Maintain a recreational fishing program in Lake Tewaukon and Sprague Lake by reducing carp and by continuing to manage the two lakes as open water migratory bird rest areas.
- Continue to provide public opportunity for hunting, wildlife observation, and photography on the Complex with limited access.
- Expand the Refuge Visitor Center, including exhibits. Expand the hours the Visitor Center is open to the public.
- Improvement of outreach programs through new brochures, a website, displays, and signs.
- Continue to provide environmental education programs and activities.

**Partnerships:**

- Continue to work with existing partners on habitat management, enhancement and protection programs, recreational programs, and environmental education activities.
- Create opportunities for new partnerships to assist in implementing the CCP.
- Foster a volunteer program on the Complex.

Specific objectives and strategies to attain goals listed in this Summary can be found within the Tewaukon National Wildlife Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan.



Great Blue Heron, © Cindie Brunner



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