



FY 2015

REGION 6  
PARTNERS FOR  
FISH & WILDLIFE PROGRAM  
ANNUAL NARRATIVE

*To efficiently achieve voluntary  
habitat restoration on private lands,  
through financial and technical  
assistance, for the benefit of Federal  
Trust Species*





## Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	2
Regional Overview.....	3
Greater Sage-Grouse.....	4
Lesser Prairie-Chicken.....	5
Monarch Butterfly.....	6
Regional Partnership Acknowledgements.....	12
Colorado Overview.....	13
Map of State Focus Areas.....	13
Conserve Habitat.....	14
Project Examples.....	22
Kansas Overview.....	33
Map of State Focus Areas.....	33
Conserve Habitat.....	33
Project Examples.....	39
Montana Overview.....	51
Map of State Focus Areas.....	51
Conserve Habitat.....	52
Project Examples.....	55
Nebraska Overview.....	61
Map of State Focus Areas.....	61
Conserve Habitat.....	61
Project Examples.....	64
North Dakota Overview.....	78
Map of State Focus Areas.....	78
Conserve Habitat.....	79
Project Example.....	87
South Dakota Overview.....	88
Map of State Focus Areas.....	88
Conserve Habitat.....	89
Project Examples.....	91
Utah Overview.....	100
Map of State Focus Areas.....	100
Conserve Habitat.....	101
Project Examples.....	101
Wyoming Overview.....	106
Map of State Focus Areas.....	106
Conserve Habitat.....	107
Project Examples.....	110

**Front Cover:** Mindy Meade, Wyoming Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program Biologist, discussing a successful project with a private landowner.



## Region 6 Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program

**Mission:** To efficiently achieve voluntary habitat restoration on private lands, through financial and technical assistance, for the benefit of Federal Trust Species.

**Cornerstones:** Trust, Respect, Honesty, Flexibility, Open Communication



*Kansas Partners staff reviewing a habitat restoration project with Habitat Restoration Branch Chief, John Schmerfeld. USFWS Photo.*

**Vision:** Our Vision is based on the philosophy of shared responsibility, cooperation and collaboration, building partnerships, focusing on priority needs, and delivering on-the-ground habitat conservation. These ideas are captured and accounted for in our strategic plan.

## Executive Summary

Fiscal Year 2015 (FY 2015) marked another outstanding year for the Region 6 Partners for Fish and Wildlife (PFW) Program. Even with fiscal challenges imposed by additional budget cuts, there were still significant acre and river mile accomplishments throughout the Region. This was the fourth year operating under the PFW 2012–2016 Mountain-Prairie Region Strategic Plan (Strategic Plan). Each individual state showcased accomplishments in this report related to the five PFW program goals:

**Goal I. Conserve Habitat** – Restore and protect priority habitats to increase and maintain federal trust species populations.

**Goal II. Broaden and Strengthen Partnerships** – Accomplish our work through voluntary partnerships.

**Goal III. Improve Information Sharing and Communication** – Collaborate and share information and concerns with our partners, stakeholders, potential future partners, decision-makers, and others to protect, restore, and enhance trust resources.

**Goal IV. Enhance Our Workforce** – The staff of our Program is our most important resource. Maintaining and supporting this staff is the key to success in achieving on-the-ground results for federal trust species.

**Goal V. Increase Accountability** – Measure, assess, and report on the effectiveness, efficiency and fiscal integrity of our habitat conservation programs and activities.

Region 6 PFW continues to anchor the United States Fish and Wildlife Service’s (Service) premier private lands delivery program. Region 6 PFW accomplishments accounted for approximately 61% of all upland acres, 27% of all wetland acres, and 35% of all river miles restored, enhanced, or created throughout the nation by the PFW program and our partners during FY 2015.

---

During FY2015, Region 6 PFW, along with private landowners and numerous conservation partners, restored, enhanced, and created:

104,419 acres of uplands

6,902 acres of wetlands

93.6 river miles

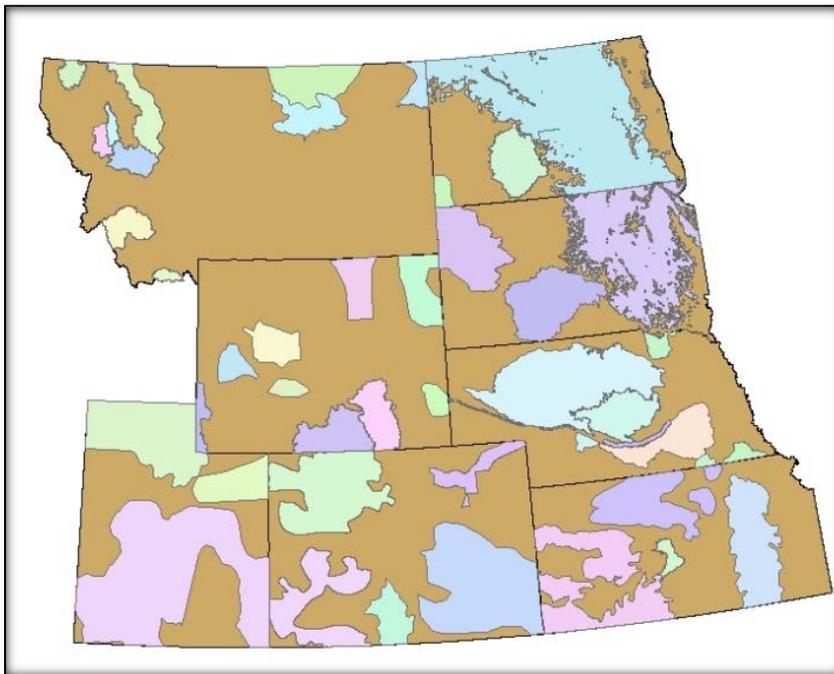
51 fish passage barriers

---

During FY 2015, the Region 6 PFW completed 599 projects and expended \$1,453,328 of Service money leveraged with \$5,241,869 of partner funds for a total investment of \$6,875,197. For every dollar the program spent we received other dollars of non-PFW program funds, resulting in an approximate 5:1 match. The incredible ability for PFW program biologists to leverage their project dollars displays both fiscal awareness as well as excellent partnership building skills. In addition to on-the-ground accomplishments, staff biologists provided technical assistance to other Service programs, private landowners, non-governmental organizations, and other agencies. Technical assistance included support to our Refuge easement program, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Farm Bill programs, and other on-the-ground habitat restoration expertise.

## Regional Overview

The Region 6 PFW program is very strategic in its approach to conservation delivery. The development of the SHC model continues to assist the PFW program with species prioritization for private lands habitat restoration. The SHC model also provides framework for monitoring and adaptive management. The SHC approach outlines a collaborative effort for achieving habitat accomplishments at an eco-regional scale. The PFW program has taken a strategic approach to conservation delivery across the Mountain-Prairie Region as clearly shown in the map below. Working with limited resources in large landscapes, it is critical that the program identifies their high priority species and focal areas for restoration and enhancement on private and tribal lands.



*Region 6 Partners Program Conservation Focus Areas Identified in the PFW 2012–2016 Mountain-Prairie Region Strategic Plan. USFWS Map.*

## Goal I. Conserve Habitat

The PFW program has four Government Performance Results Act (GPRA) goals that we are accountable for each year. The Region 6 PFW program far exceeded GRPA goals in FY 2015, restoring and enhancing habitat for high priority fish and wildlife species identified within our strategic plan. The table below summarizes FY 2015 accomplishments, FY 2015 goals, and percentages of five-year goals completed during FY 2012–FY 2015.

<b>Operational Plan Metric</b>	<b>FY 2015 Accomplishments</b>	<b>FY 2015 Goal</b>	<b>% 5-year Goal Completed</b>
<b>3.1.1 Number of non-FWS riparian (stream/shoreline) miles restored, including miles restored through partnerships (including miles treated for invasives &amp; now restored) annual</b>	<b>94 Miles</b>	<b>30 Miles</b>	<b>90%</b>
<b>4.1.1 Number of Wetland acres enhanced/restored through voluntary partnerships (includes acres treated for invasives &amp; now restored)- annual</b>	<b>6,902 Acres</b>	<b>3,200 Acres</b>	<b>157%</b>
<b>4.2.1 Number of non-FWS Upland acres enhanced/restored through voluntary partnerships (includes acres treated for invasives &amp; now restored)- annual</b>	<b>104,419 Acres</b>	<b>49,000 Acres</b>	<b>96%</b>
<b>5.1.14 Number of fish barriers removed or installed</b>	<b>51 Units</b>	<b>8 Units</b>	<b>152%</b>

Since 1987, the Region 6 PFW program has completed 15,565 projects with private landowners, tribes, non-governmental organizations, and other cooperators. Conservation projects have benefitted 241,837 acres of wetland habitat, 3,073,506 acres of upland habitat, and 2,825 river miles of habitat.

### Greater Sage-Grouse

During FY 2015, the Service determined that protection for the greater sage-grouse under the Endangered Species Act was not warranted for listing because of conservation efforts and rebounding populations recovering from a cyclical decline. State and federal agencies, private landowners, and numerous conservation partners worked together to conserve, enhance, and restore sagebrush habitat for obligate species at the landscape scale. The greater sage-grouse conservation effort is one of the largest and the most challenging conservation undertakings in U.S. history.

During FY 2015, PFW biologists and their partners enhanced or restored over 12,000 acres of upland and wetland habitats for greater sage-grouse.



*Greater sage-grouse. USFWS Photo*

The PFW Regional Coordinator provided guidance, expertise and support for the USDA NRCS Sage Grouse Initiative (SGI) and Strategic Watershed Action Team (SWAT). The Region 6 PFW program supported seven shared SGI SWAT field biologist positions during FY 2015. The PFW program will continue to provide support for these positions through FY 2016. To maximize project dollars, PFW program biologists worked closely with SWAT staff to increase habitat benefits and support landscape-level conservation efforts. PFW cooperators throughout Region 6 have benefitted from the collaborative partnership.

PFW program staff worked closely with private landowners and USFWS Ecological Services to pursue Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances (CCAAs). PFW program staff also worked with Ecological Services staff to strengthen opportunities for CCAAs by providing input regarding strategic methods, building trust, and potential concerns. PFW and Ecological Services staff are working together to enhance sagebrush habitat on private lands currently under a CCAA.

### **Lesser Prairie-Chicken**

During FY 2015, PFW biologists and their partners enhanced or restored over 7,375 acres of upland and wetland habitats for lesser prairie-chicken.

By collaborating with State, Federal, and local partners, Region 6 biologists have played an active role in lesser prairie-chicken conservation. In Colorado, PFW staff worked with local Conservation Districts to assist with project implementation, provide technical assistance, and influence conservation efforts. In addition, PFW staff pursued external funding with

conservation partners for lesser prairie-chicken habitat enhancement, and served as a liaison between ranching communities and Ecological Services. Colorado PFW staff are also working to strengthen collaborative opportunities with Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) staff who are implementing Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA) funding. This partnership is attempting to develop and implement new restoration techniques.

In Kansas, on-the-ground conservation for lesser prairie-chickens habitat was strengthened through two new funding sources (Cooperative Recovery Initiative, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation). New funding allowed large-scale lesser prairie-chicken conservation efforts to continue. Additionally, the Kansas PFW teamed up with the Comanche Pool Prairie Resource Foundation to harness National Fish and Wildlife Foundation Impact Directed Environmental Account funds to support habitat improvement projects and CPPRF outreach and education.



*PFW-funded habitat enhancement project site in western Kansas. PFW biologists work with private landowners to benefit lesser prairie-chicken habitat throughout its range. USFWS Photo.*

## **Monarch Butterfly**

On June 20, 2014, The White House issued a Presidential Memorandum for Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies calling for ‘Creating a Federal Strategy to Promote the Health of Honey Bees and Other Pollinators’. This memorandum recognizes the substantial contribution pollinators make to the U.S. economy and their importance in sustaining fruit, nut, and vegetable production. The memorandum also points out severe declines of pollinators and highlights the decline of migrating monarch butterflies (lowest recorded population level during 2013-14) and that there is an imminent risk of failed migration.

*Native grass and milkweed response to PFW-funded habitat enhancement project in Nebraska. Milkweed provides important habitat for monarch butterflies and other pollinators. USFWS Photo.*

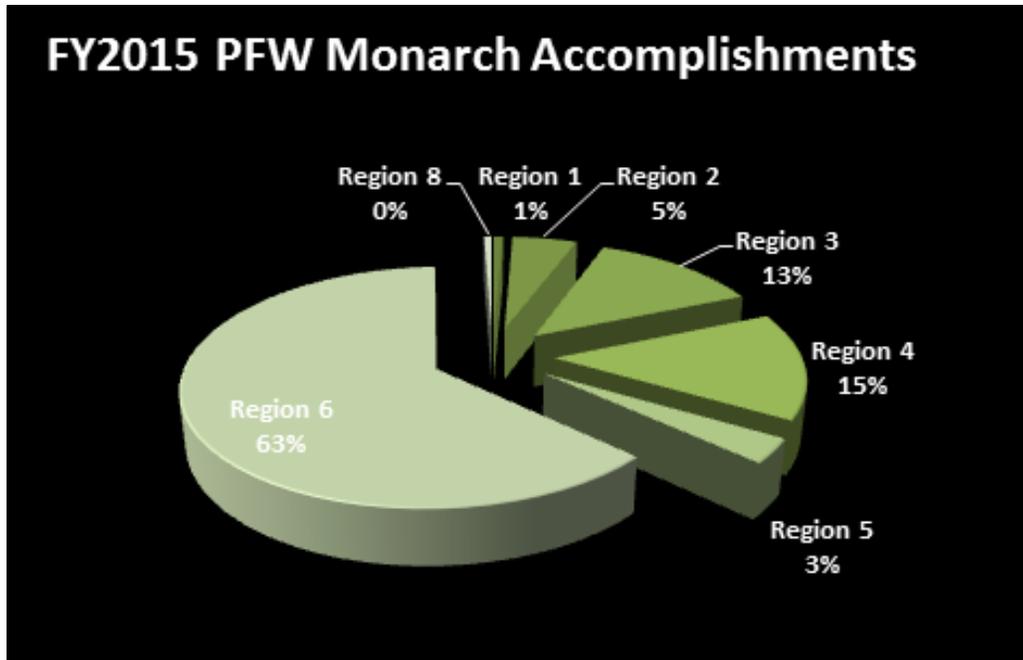


*Monarch butterfly on Baldwin Ironweed during fall migration through the Flint Hills Focus Area, Kansas. USFWS photo.*

Service Director Dan Ashe was subsequently tasked by Secretary Jewell to convene an interagency High Level Working Group (HLWG) to develop and implement a U.S. strategy for monarch conservation, coordinate efforts with Mexico and Canada through the Trilateral Committee for Wildlife and Ecosystem Conservation and Management, and ensure that the monarch strategy is coordinated with development of the Federal Pollinator Strategy and DOI assignments in the Presidential Memo.

A Service strategy for monarch conservation was developed to address plans for habitat restoration and enhancement, education and outreach, and monitoring and research needs. Part of this strategy entails developing monarch habitat establishment and restoration projects for immediate implementation during fall 2014 and spring 2015 on Service lands and facilities and on state and private lands through partnership projects. In Region 6, the PFW program had a target of 17,000 acres of native prairie restoration for monarch butterflies on private lands by FY 2015. These habitat restoration projects will benefit monarch butterflies as well as a suite of high priority Federal trust species and other pollinators.

During FY 2015, PFW biologists and their partners enhanced or restored over 46,000 acres of upland and wetland habitats for monarch butterflies. Region 6 PFW accomplishments benefiting monarch butterflies accounted for approximately 63% of all PFW-funded accomplishments completed during FY 2015.



## **Goal II. Broaden and Strengthen Partnerships**

### **Farm Bill**

Region 6 PFW staff worked with Headquarters leadership to successfully influence Farm Bill programs at national and state levels. The PFW program continues to work closely with the USDA NRCS Working Lands for Wildlife (WLFW) Initiative throughout various species ranges within the initiative. PFW staff worked closely with State Technical Committees to enhance opportunities for landowners and increase impacts to fish and wildlife resources.

The Region 6 PFW program has been able to provide tremendous opportunities to local landowners through these additional WLFW funds, providing incredible leverage to the existing PFW program habitat restoration funds. PFW program leadership recognizes the value of this important partnership and is constantly looking for ways to further support these incredible efforts, through technical assistance and other resources when possible.

### **Partnerships**

Region 6 PFW program provided tremendous amounts of technical assistance during FY 2015 and brought in numerous new partners. Landowner relationships are the building blocks of the program and the addition of new partners highlights the many alliances Region 6 PFW program is building with NGOs, tribes, and with along with Federal and state agencies.



*PFW Regional Coordinator, Heather Johnson and other sponsors with Maggie Creek Ranch manager John Griggs receiving the Environmental Stewardship Award during the Cattle Industry Convention. Photo courtesy of the Cattle Industry Convention.*

### **Goal III. Improve Information Sharing and Communication**

During FY 2015, the Region 6 PFW program continued to maintain strong communication with their landowners and key partners. Internal and external communication was maintained to strengthen partnerships throughout the year. This was evident at all layers within the program and throughout every state and existing partnership. Open communication is one of the cornerstones of the Region 6 PFW program and crucial to its success.

The Region 6 PFW program aspires to build, maintain, and create ways of sharing information and communicating both internally and externally. Much of the focus is external as the conservation community is diverse and composed of many non-Service partners. It takes a very special set of interpersonal skills to successfully navigate through the complex relationships and PFW biologists excel at the techniques it takes to further partnerships. PFW program State Coordinators, Assistant State Coordinators, and field staff were involved in district watershed, state technical and local community-based meetings. The Regional Coordinator and Deputy Regional Coordinator attended regional and national-level meetings to maintain communication with key partners.



*Regional and Kansas PFW program staff discuss additional opportunities for habitat restoration and enhancement projects with local landowners, western Kansas. USFWS photo.*

#### **Goal IV. Enhance our Workforce**

The Region 6 PFW program continues to support employee development with a strong understanding that the skills and abilities of the biologists are one of the most valuable things the program brings to a partnership. There is an expectation to be proficient and maintain knowledge in all manners of restoration techniques applicable to a given focus area. Individual Development Plans (IDP's) are formulated for each employee within the Region 6 PFW program and are revised on an annual basis. Opportunities for personal development are afforded to every employee in the program and prioritized with input from the direct supervisor. In addition to personal development, the program maintains a Workforce Plan. The Region 6 PFW program Workforce Plan is a strategic document that outlines the management of human capital for the program. Updates were made to the Workforce Plan to reflect current and potential budget cuts. The plan includes a strategy for managing staff if the program receives a funding increase, a decrease, or remains flat. This has allowed the State Coordinators the opportunity to plan and prioritize where they will place field biologists to maximize benefits to high priority Federal trust species, even if the PFW program receives budget cuts.



*Region 6 PFW state and regional staff visit a PFW-funded native fish project in the San Luis Valley, Colorado. USFWS Photo.*

## **Goal V. Increase Accountability**

The Region 6 PFW program continues to take a strategic approach in habitat outcomes for high priority species and links those habitat outcomes to biological outcomes. The PFW program uses the Habitat Information Tracking System (HabITS) database to report all on-the-ground accomplishments. In addition, Technical Assistance activities are also captured in the HabITS Strategic Planning Module. These data are used to respond to a wide variety of data calls from the Regional Director, the PFW program National Branch Chief, OMB Examiner, Congress, etc. In addition, these data can be used to determine biological outcomes for those species that the Region 6 has models developed for. These efforts continue to expand as new scientific information becomes available from the Regional Science Applications team as well as the Regional and National Inventory and Monitoring programs in Refuges.

The Region 6 PFW Management Team met in the Sandhills of Nebraska to discuss the development of a Regional PFW program monitoring plan. Framework and a schedule for completion of the Regional monitoring plan were developed. The final plan will be completed during FY 2016.

## Regional Partnership Acknowledgements

We want to thank our conservation partners for helping us leverage a tremendous amount of additional resources and for supporting conservation projects on private and tribal lands. With funding cuts over the past couple of years and FY 2015 being a flat budget, there has been a tremendous need for additional external funding for project support and success. Many key partners provided these contributions, making FY 2015 another productive and effective year.

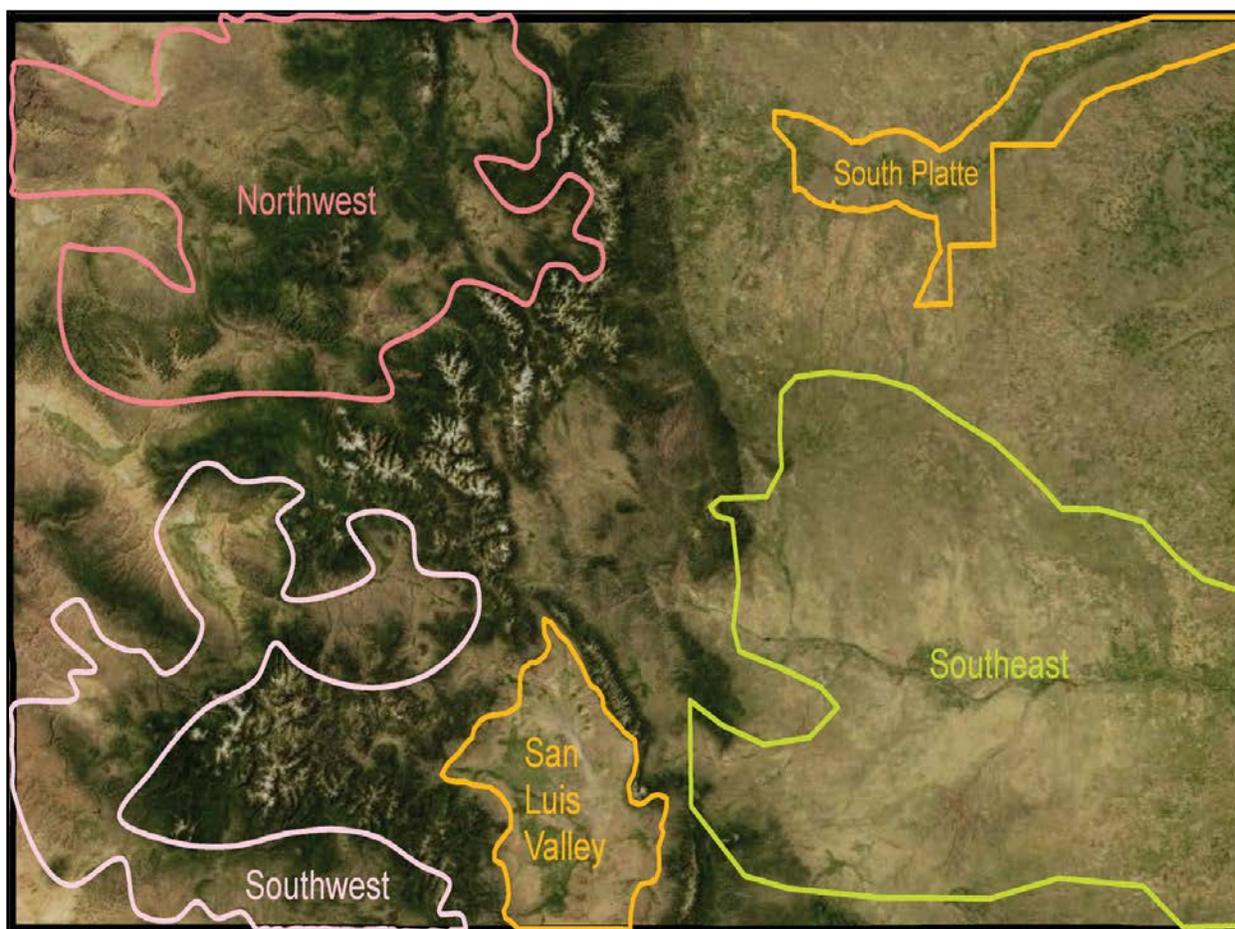
We would also like to thank landowners within Region 6. Because of the predominance of private land throughout the region, we would not be successful without their desire to improve rangeland and wildlife habitats. Together, we have furthered conservation and enhanced wildlife habitat at a landscape scale. Finding win-win solutions to complex environmental problems are the foundation of our successes and we're satisfied to know that PFW-funded projects benefit high priority species while supporting viable agriculture and sustainable rural communities. We have successfully implemented thousands of conservation projects and enhanced millions of acres of upland, wetland, and riparian habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. Private landowners have contributed to positive wildlife population trends over the years. Often while farming and ranching, private landowner contributions to wildlife conservation and our economy cannot be overemphasized nor applauded enough. Thank you for allowing us to provide assistance to you. Thank you for all that you do, and cheers to another great year!



*National PFW Team Lead, Matthew Filsinger, with a private landowner in South Dakota. USFWS photo.*

## Colorado Overview

This narrative presents a summary of the Colorado Partners for Fish and Wildlife (CO PFW) Program's FY 2015 efforts toward achieving the stated goals of the 2012-2016 strategic plan. In FY 2015, CO-PFW completed 30 projects [as reported for GPRA (Government Performance and Results Act)] through Private Land Agreements (PLAs) with landowners and other partners in the five focus areas across the State. These agreements resulted in 938.5 acres and 3 river miles restored or enhanced. Additionally, 31 new PLAs were signed in FY 2015, which will address 663 acres of wetlands, 6,625 acres of uplands and 3.5 miles of riparian habitat. Of these 31 FY 2015 PLAs, 18 have already been completed and invoiced.



*Colorado PFW program Focus Areas. USFWS Map.*

Bill Noonan  
Colorado PFW Program State Coordinator  
134 Union Boulevard, Suite 400  
Lakewood, CO 80228  
303-236-5462  
bill\_noonan@fws.gov

During FY 2015, the CO PFW program continued to develop and implement projects within our five identified focus areas. In all focus areas, a great deal of time and effort is put into establishing strong local level cooperation and coordination with all other organizations with a private land habitat restoration nexus. The CO PFW program continued to operate with a vacancy at the Assistant State Coordinator position for the entire Fiscal Year due to overall Service budget issues.

## **Goal I. Conserve Habitat**

The CO PFW program made progress during FY 2015 toward meeting the habitat conservation goals enumerated in the 2012-2016 PFW Strategic Plan. Progress in some focus areas and habitat types was significant while in others progress was limited due to a variety of local and regional environment and social conditions. Significant program effort in 2015 was focused on participating and influencing Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Lesser Prairie Chicken (LPCI), Working Lands and Wildlife and the Sage Grouse (SGI) special initiative's implementation with varying degrees of success.

Due to the importance of greater (GSG) and Gunnison's sage grouse (GuSG) to the Service, the CO PFW program has become heavily vested in sage steppe restoration and NRCS's SGI effort in Colorado. In addition to continuing to provide financial support to the Bird Conservancy of the Rockies (BCR aka RMBO) SGI SWAT position in Kremmling, the Colorado NW Focus Area PFW biologist spends a great deal of time and energy working to integrate CO PFW into all SGI projects in those counties where local NRCS staff accept such collaboration. The concept of a team approach to project development and design (e.g., NRCS, Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW), RMBO, CO PFW) of SGI projects is the overall goal. Improving Colorado PFW SGI collaboration with NRCS offices in GSG range will remain a high priority for Colorado PFW.

Work with Gunnison's sage grouse (GuSG) through SGI is also a key component of Colorado PFW in the SW Focus Area. In FY 2015, the Service's R6 Regional Director committed to provide significant funding to Bird Conservancy of the Rockies for placement of a SGI SWAT biologist in the Montrose Colorado NRCS office with the explicit goal of developing and implementing habitat projects in the GuSG satellite populations. The position is also supported by NRCS SGI and BLM. Our Focus Area biologist in Gunnison Colorado will work closely with the new SWAT biologist. The highly controversial listing of GuSG as Threatened under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) has the potential to impact delivery of GuSG project however to date that has not seemed to be the case. The day after the listing was announced two landowner signed PLAs that will improve wet meadow brood rearing habitat for GuSG, and there have been several other GuSG project as well. Our field staff working with the Montrose SGI SWAT biologist will be successful in delivering GuSG projects, however establishing trust with landowners in the satellite populations of GuSG will take patience. CO PFW staff assisted the Western Colorado Ecological Service's Office in the development of the 4(d) Rule for GuSG. That rule should be available for public comment soon.

Wetland and riparian habitat remain a major emphasis across all focus areas as our long term relationship with the Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) Wetland Program remains strong. An FY 2103 Cooperative Agreement from CPW provides \$100,000/year for five years to Colorado PFW for wetlands and riparian restoration. We remain on track to spend these funds with \$225,000 now invoiced. The San Luis Valley and South Platte Focus Areas comprised the majority of shallow water, seasonal wetland projects for migratory waterbirds. The CO PFW program is nearing the FY 2016 completion of our portion of a NAWCA Grant specifically for the San Luis Valley. Wetland

projects in the San Luis Valley and North Park are typically designed with waterbird nesting needs in mind while wetland projects in South Platte and elsewhere in the state are designed to meet the requirements of migration.

Riparian restoration primarily through fencing and/or removal of invasive tamarisk and Russian olive occurs in all focus areas. Tamarisk removal has been the principal wetland/riparian project type in the Southeast Focus area for several years now and will likely remain so. Working through Cooperative Agreements with Colorado Conservation Districts, 6 tamarisk removal projects were completed in the Huerfano watershed. This partnership also hosted the 2015 Cross Watershed Network/Arkansas River Watershed annual meeting, where ongoing landowner efforts and techniques were highlighted in the field day lead in part by CO PFW staff. Additionally, multi-year landowner partnerships continued ongoing efforts to treat long single ownership reaches of various drainages. CO PFW work with Three Rivers Alliance (TRA) and the Walton Family Foundation (WFF) are in areas that fall outside of our mapped Focus Areas. TRA is a locally led conservation and sustainability effort in the Republican River watershed that we support through technical assistance and project funding. Our South Platte Focus Area biologist in cooperation with RMBO and NRCS has obtained one Small North American Wetlands Conservation Grant for the TRA area and has now received and is administering a second grant. These funds augment other sources to remove woody invasives from several project sites. The WFF grant is now complete and was limited to the Dolores River Watershed in Southwestern Colorado and also eastern Utah and the Escalante River in Utah both of which the Utah PFW office is handling. The grant from WFF provided the opportunity to expand our partnership with WFF, the Tamarisk Coalition and area landowners. It also allowed us to improve habitat for the Yellow-billed Cuckoo which is now listed as Threatened under the Endangered Species Act. The grant led to 620 acres of improved riparian habitat in both States and leveraged the initial \$200,000 of WFF funds into a project total of \$790,000. WFF was very pleased with the performance of CO and UT PFW programs and has expressed interest in a second funding cycle for the Escalante River in Utah but have reached their five year funding limit for the Dolores river watershed. Improving riparian habitat for the Southwestern Willow Fly-catcher and other migratory birds is the goal of our riparian projects in the San Luis Valley. These projects are often in cooperation with NRCS's Working Lands for Wildlife.

Work with native fishes, both warm and cold water, and amphibians is pursued when opportunities are presented. Several projects in the Northwest Colorado targeted at Colorado River cutthroat trout have been completed, in process or planning. We have a continuing partnership with the Colorado Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office (CO FWCO) to better understand impacts of flood/fire regime on native greenback cutthroat trout and its associated habitat. This growing understanding should result in increased capacity to find, evaluate, and monitor potential and existing projects. The Northwest Focus Area biologist also hosted a field visit by Dr. Michael Lannoo of the University of Indiana with CPW and USFS to review past boreal toad habitat work. In the San Luis Valley Focus Area CPW continued monitoring of Hot Springs Creek/ditch (CO-SLV-10-001) and confirmed successful reintroduction/reproduction of Rio Grande Suckers. Work in our Southwest Focus Area included assisting/collaboration with CPW native aquatic biologists on Rio Grande Cutthroat trout brood stock lake dam repair project (moving forward); consultation/partnership with CPW, USFS on Boreal Toad re-introduction site where CO PFW staff will lead the wetland survey and design.

The FY 2015 and cumulative GPRA accomplishments by Colorado Focus Area are presented in the tables below.

<b>South Platte Ecosystem Focus Area</b>				
<b>Habitat Type</b>	<b>2015 Total</b>	<b>Cumulative Total</b>	<b>2012-2017 Targets</b>	<b>% Completed</b>
<b>Grassland restoration/ enhancement (acres)</b>	<b>416</b>	<b>2555</b>	<b>4000</b>	<b>64%</b>
<b>Wetland restoration/establishment (acres)</b>	<b>184</b>	<b>828</b>	<b>1200</b>	<b>69%</b>
<b>Riparian / Stream Restoration / Enhancement (miles)</b>	<b>2.6</b>	<b>8.8</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>59%</b>

<b>San Luis Valley Focus Area</b>				
<b>Habitat Type</b>	<b>2015 Total</b>	<b>Cumulative Total</b>	<b>2012-2017 Targets</b>	<b>% Completed</b>
<b>Grassland restoration/ enhancement (acres)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>310</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>77.5%</b>
<b>Riparian / Stream Restoration / Enhancement (miles)</b>	<b>1.25</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>96%</b>
<b>Wetland restoration/ enhancement (acres)</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>1377</b>	<b>1700</b>	<b>81%</b>
<b>Fish barriers constructed (#)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>33%</b>

<b>Southwest Focus Area</b>				
<b>Habitat Type</b>	<b>2015 Total</b>	<b>Cumulative Total</b>	<b>2012-2017 Targets</b>	<b>% Completed</b>
<b>Grassland/sage steppe restoration/ enhancement (acres)</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>1794</b>	<b>2500</b>	<b>72%</b>
<b>Wetland restoration/ enhancement (acres)</b>	<b>143.4</b>	<b>410</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>20%</b>
<b>Riparian / Stream Restoration / Enhancement (miles)</b>	<b>2.13</b>	<b>10.37</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>52%</b>
<b>In-stream Structures (#)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10%</b>

<b>Southeast Focus Area</b>				
<b>Habitat Type</b>	<b>2015 Total</b>	<b>Cumulative Total</b>	<b>2012-2017 Targets</b>	<b>% Completed</b>
<b>Grassland restoration/ enhancement (acres)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2197</b>	<b>1250</b>	<b>175%</b>
<b>Wetland restoration/ enhancement (acres)</b>	<b>299.6</b>	<b>891</b>	<b>1000</b>	<b>89%</b>
<b>Riparian / Stream Restoration / Enhancement (miles)</b>	<b>1.75</b>	<b>2.5</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>18%</b>
<b>LPC Fence Marking</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>100%</b>

<b>Northwest Focus Area</b>				
<b>Habitat Type</b>	<b>2015 Total</b>	<b>Cumulative Total</b>	<b>2012-2017 Targets</b>	<b>% Completed</b>
<b>Upland restoration/ enhancement (acres)</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>50,306</b>	<b>8625</b>	<b>583%</b>
<b>Riparian / Stream Restoration / Enhancement (miles)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>15.76</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>157.6%</b>
<b>In-stream Structures (#)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Wetland restoration/ enhancement (acres)</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>392</b>	<b>500</b>	<b>78%</b>

## **Goal II. Broaden and Strengthen Partnerships**

The CO PFW program in FY 2015 improved and maintained our long term partnership base. Our well established partnership with the CPW continues through another cooperative agreement which was signed in the spring of 2015. Our working relationships with NRCS, Ducks Unlimited (DU), The Nature Conservancy (TNC), and Colorado Opens Lands (COL) remain strong. Ducks Unlimited has a new Director of Conservation for Colorado and Wyoming who has already demonstrated interest in ramping up project cooperation with CO PFW. There are continuing cooperative efforts with several conservation districts and BCR. The partnership with Trout Unlimited in NW Colorado for stream restoration efforts continues with one multi-year project completed and other new project potentials being evaluated. New project specific relationships have been established with the Montrose and San Miguel County Weed Control Districts for removal of invasive trees. CO PFW field staff strives to build and strengthen local partner collaborations and networks and attended numerous statewide and local meetings to maintain and establish partnerships. Additional new partners CO PFW worked with this last FY

include: Southern Plains Land Trust, Cross Watershed Network (XWN), Watershed Artisans (to host an Induced Meander workshop), Synergy Ecological Restoration,

The partnership with the Walton Family Foundation is for riparian restoration efforts in the Dolores River watershed was successfully completed in 2015 (see above). The partnership with the Colorado Wildlife Heritage Foundation (CWHF) in the form of a Cooperative Agreement to provide an alternate method of payment to Colorado PFW cooperators was put into place in FY 2013 and continues to work very well. The State coordinator has presented to the CWHF Board November 2014 where our work and collaboration was well received. CPW leadership was also in attendance, helping to reinforce our longstanding cooperation.

A proposal by the CO PFW Northwest Focus Area biologist and his CPW colleagues to purchase a no till seed drill for the restoration and enhancement of sage steppe was funded by the Regional Directorate. This will not only improve thousands of acres for habitat for both GSG and GuSG but adds to the strength of our partnership with CPW for CO PFW and Region 6 as a whole. This ongoing partnership is proving to be fully successful throughout the range for both sage grouse species. A report of the first year's accomplishment is expected from CPW shortly. This biologist also moved to Grand Junction, Colorado from Walden, Colorado; there will be no change in Focus Area or duties. This move has opened up new partnership opportunities in the Grand Junction area.

### **Goal III. Improve Information Sharing and Communication**

Internal Communication: Colorado Ecological Services (CO ES) and the CO PFW Programs continue to work well together through FY 2015. New Co ES leadership in the Western Colorado ES Office is pursuing a more collaborative approach to CO ES issues. The new project Leader for the San Luis Valley National Wildlife Refuge system complex is similarly interested in increased collaboration with CO PFW which will be implemented in FY 16. More specifically, in FY CO PFW staff assisted CO ES with input on GuSG efforts to provide programmatic regulatory predictability through 4(d) Rules for Farm Bill Initiative program participants. CO PFW staff interacts regularly with refuge management staff at the San Luis Valley and Arapaho National Wildlife Refuges. Increased communication and coordination with the Project Leader of the Colorado Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office (COFWCO) initiated in FY 2013 has continued in FY 2015.

External Communication: Colorado has a new NRCS State Conservationist in place, the CO PFW Coordinator and CPW Private Lands Coordinator have maintained the bi-monthly lunch meeting schedule begun three State Cons ago. With the increased NRCS, CPW, and CO PFW collaboration resulting from SGI, LPCI and Working Lands for Wildlife they have become critical for melding efforts and dealing with issues at the management level to insure consistent guidance for all private land field biologists – we are not all the way there yet however. Meetings and/or electronic communication with the CPW Private Lands and Wetlands Coordinators occur virtually daily. In addition, CO PFW staff has been assisting the Colorado Natural Heritage Program (CNHP) with reference site and identification and also informal steering committee for the Lower South Platte Wetlands Profile and Condition Assessment conducted through CNHP and CPW though an EPA grant. PFW also has been involved with

project site line up and study scoping of a follow up CPW wetland food value study which will provide timely onsite and location specific monitoring for future projects and current PFW long term project monitoring. The State Coordinator and staff have increased outreach to CPW Aquatic Biologists to increase awareness of our program for delivery of native fish and amphibian habitat restoration projects on private lands. Coordination with the Region 6 ARD for Fisheries has been extremely useful in this effort.

Field staff attend a wide variety of local, state, and regionally focused meetings including NRCS Special Initiative national meetings; localized Conservation District Watershed Groups; Wetland Focus Areas, Tamarisk Coalition, TRA, Gunnison Climate Change Working Group to name but a few. CO PFW staff is heavily involved with implementation of NRCS's SGI (both GuSg and GSG) and Working Lands for Wildlife for southwestern willow flycatcher. Each U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) State Technical Committee and Wildlife sub-committee meeting is attended by the State Coordinator or acting. PFW field staff often initiates and lead joint efforts within their geographic areas promoting a team approach to habitat restoration. The list below offers a glimpse into the wide range of technical assistance and outreach activities conducted by CO PFW field staff.

- Provide migratory bird info for local District Conservationist who is on National NRCS WRP team assignment.
- Outreach to CPW Native Aquatics Biologists.
- South Platte Basin CNHP Steering Committee meeting/ CPW wetland food value study.
- South Platte Basin wetland multi agency/partner workload meeting.
- Outreach to Augmentation water districts in Lower South Platte
- Meet with conservation partners and Bonny SWA CPW staff for management plan and grant writing
- Present on CO PFW at four Playa workshops organized by Pheasants Forever
- Helped organized regular wildlife focused column for the rural publication the "Fencepost" article and provided an article for print.
- Helped get a Colorado State Extension Website on wildlife partnerships up and running.
- Participation in Gunnison Climate Change Working Group meetings (GuSG)
- Provide technical assistance to NRCS offices in Gunnison, San Luis Valley, Montrose, Delta, Archuleta, La Plata
- Continued collaboration with Dolores River Restoration Partnership, TC, TNC
- Collaboration with Montrose & San Miguel County Weed Departments (RO & Tamarisk projects/planning)
- Continued collaboration with Chama Peaks Landowner Alliance
- Completion of program handout/brochure for both San Luis Valley & Southwest focus areas
- Participation in Blanco Basin Landowner Workshop
- Gave presentation/discussion with visiting Colorado State University Warner College of Natural Resources Graduate students through the Gunnison Climate Change Working Group
- Presented at Greater Sage Grouse practitioners meeting in the Regional Office
- Participated in North Park Phacelia conservation planning with multiple partners

- Participated in multiple greater sage grouse working groups
- Provided technical assistance to a bat conservation program in Steamboat Springs
- Worked with COFWCO office to analysis 2014 field data and develop field report for submission to NPS. Assisted in coordination and implementation of 2015 data collection and data analysis.
- Gas creek project. Provide stream habitat restoration recommendations for ongoing NRCS project.
- Assisted in Stream Visual Assessment Protocol (SVAP) evaluations of NRCS project sites in Chaffee and El Paso counties.
- CPW Landowner meetings. Participated in CPW landowner project development in Pueblo County.
- NRCS landowner meetings. Participated in numerous NRCS coordinated landowner meetings for project development.
- Purgatoire Working Grp. Participating in Purgatoire River project planning and development with CFS, NRCS, and local CDs.
- Worked with CPW LPC biologist to develop grant applications for innovative LPC projects in SE CO. Funding sources sought within Service and outside grant sourcing. Worked with NRCS/CPW to identify partnership opportunities on projects. Provided connection between ES staff and local entities and agencies on LPC issues.
- Staffing. Provided recommendations on existing FB biologist positions and area need to hosting organizations.
- CNHP Wetland Mapping. Working with CPW and CNHP to provide localized expertise for wetland mapping project.
- Induced Meander Workshop. Worked with CBR, local CD, and CPW to organize a late summer landowner, and professional, educational workshop on new restoration methodology.
- Watershed Network/ARKWHIPP. Served on organizing committee for multi-state, watershed coordination effort. Hosted and presented at field day.
- Mile High Youth Corp - Solicited and developed a Service youth grant to utilize the youth corp on a habitat project. Provided members with induced meandering training.
- Land Trust. Provided technical assistance to Southern Colorado Land Trust on habitat restoration opportunities within their 5,000 acre holdings in Bent and Baca counties.
- Land Trust. Developing relationship with land trust entities working within South Park area to develop project opportunities.
- Submitted multiple public relations articles highlighting restoration efforts and provided coordination for inter & intra-agency outreach trips.

#### **Goal IV. Enhance our Workforce**

Training for both improved Program delivery and professional growth is a major goal for the Colorado PFW Program. Due to current budget issues training outside of Colorado will be limited and we will be taking advantage of the newly Region 6 Employee Development

Program. Each staff member develops a yearly Individualized Development Plan (IDP) each year to focus training efforts and allow for appropriate training opportunities to be directed to them. CO PFW staff attended a variety of professional meetings and training to improve species and technical skills, examples include the International Sage Grouse Symposium in Salt Lake City, Inspiring Leadership Through Emotional Intelligence, Fish Ecology, Colorado Wildlife Society, America's Grasslands Conference, Leading At The Speed Of Trust, Basic Financial Assistance, and the Tamarisk Coalition (TC) Annual Conference. In addition, as presented above, all staff attend and present at various local workshops and meetings to both exchange and acquire new information and ideas.

## **Goal V. Increase Accountability**

Colorado projects were entered into Habitat Information Tracking System (HabITS) in accordance with database guidelines and policy. Quality control of both projects and data begins with field staff that take pride in the biology and accounting underpinning each project. Over the course of FY 2015 Colorado PFW staff has worked diligently to improve PLAs mapping products, project benefit write-ups and project photos. All projects are further reviewed by the State Coordinator for quality, account fidelity, and resource targets. In FY 2015 the Colorado PFW program, along with the other Region 6 State PFW Programs completed the design of a monitoring and evaluation plan. The approach developed fits existing resources (manpower and fiscal) and will not impact project delivery efficiency. This plan will be incorporated into the upcoming revision of the Colorado PFW Strategic Plan.

## **Conclusion**

For FY 2016 the CO PFW expects continued progress and increased involvement with both species of sage grouse and to a lesser extent the lesser prairie chicken. Although no large sage steppe or grassland projects were completed this year, several are either under way or in the planning stage. Additional native trout projects have been identified and will hopefully result in habitat restoration agreements. Similarly, our increased outreach effort to CPW Aquatic staff to cooperate on amphibian and plains fishes projects appears to have some traction. The cooperative agreement with CPW provides further wetland/riparian habitat restoration funding through June of 2018 and therefore some stability to our program. It is hoped that the 2016 Service budget will allow filling of the now vacant Assistant State Coordinator position. This would allow full coverage of the San Luis Valley focus area, assist in program management as well as relieve the current workload of our biologist in Gunnison.

## Project Example 1

**HabITS ID:** 787414

**Project title:** CO-NW-15-002 Utterback Ranch

**Date of final project completion:** 7/20/2015

**Project location details:** Routt County, Colorado

**Narrative summary of the project:**

Due to a general lack of natural fire disturbance, the mixed aspen forest in this location has transitioned into becoming decadent and diseased overtime. A variety of aspen cankers and rots have been identified by the State Forest Service, and control methods are now planned to remove the affected trees. Selected logging in marked areas removed the sick trees allowing for natural aspen regeneration. Conifers and any young aspen, were not touched. This work will assist in maintaining healthy aspen clone groups for the long term; with its benefits to a host of neo-tropical migrants, cavity nesting woodpeckers, and birds of prey such as the Northern Goshawk. The mapping best shows how mosaics will be created by leaving the majority of standing dead trees, while also promoting the vertical structure and improved age class aspen forest that is important for so many avian species. Tree removal will occur with the slash piles to be burned the very next winter season to ensure that artificial denning and cover areas for predators are removed. This 25 acre project is in association with 33 acres that were treated previously on the 2,135 acre Ranch.

**Federal Trust Species:** Neo-tropical migrants, cavity nesting woodpeckers, northern goshawk

**Project Financials:**

**Project Financials:**

**Aspen Management:**

CO PFW.....	\$5,000.00
CPW.....	\$11,250.00
NRCS.....	\$7,828.00
<u>Landowner.....</u>	<u>\$5,822.00</u>
<b>Project Total .....</b>	<b>\$29,900.00</b>



*Before diseased aspen removal. USFWS Photo.*



*Restoration work in progress. USFWS Photo.*



*After diseased aspen removal. USFWS photo.*

## Project Example 2

**HabITS ID:** 937433

**Project title:** CO-SP-15-002 Gebauer

**Date of final project completion:** 9/8/2015

**Project location details:** Washington County

### **Narrative summary of the project:**

This project enhanced 53 acres of wet meadow/wetland, 25 acres of upland by removing invasive Russian olive, and other noxious weeds such as Canada thistle and Leafy spurge. This will promote native grasses and wet meadow species to compete against, and keep the olives from invading along and around the adjacent wetlands. This will increase utilization by migratory waterfowl, shore, and wading birds and have a positive effect for livestock grazing. The invasive species will be removed utilizing a cut stump/mulching method. The landowner agrees to burn/bury the slash piles as environmental conditions allow within 3 years on this property and also on the adjacent WRP easement. This project is adjacent to a 143 acre perpetual WRP easement managed by NRCS (PLA CO-SP-04-008). This WRP is also undergoing a Russian olive removal project at the same time as this project, which is funded by NRCS. This wetland enhancement/invasive removal project will add to the overall wetland enhancement project on this ranch and provide long term benefits to migratory birds.

This property is located ½ mile from Prewitt Reservoir. The reservoir is a major stopover for migratory birds in NE Colorado. Prewitt reservoir is also an important recreational property for Colorado Parks and Wildlife. This project is expected to increase migratory water bird presence on the adjoining public use lands. A grazing plan will be developed for this property and the adjoining WRP easement by NRCS; in consultation with PFW to enhance the native grass for ranching and wildlife benefits. This project will enhance associated upland and wet meadow nesting and migratory habitat for grassland songbirds, water birds, and shore birds by removing encroaching invasive woody olives, and removing vertical structure barriers to these species. It will also promote native plant communities by reducing soil nitrogen levels and allowing understory sun light availability.

**Federal Trust Species:** Mallard, wood duck, American wigeon, teal spp., northern pintail, short-eared owl, northern harrier, northern leopard frog, white-faced ibis, sandhill crane, migratory birds

### **Project Financials:**

CPW Wetlands Funds thru CO PFW.....	\$9,000.00
<u>Landowner.....</u>	<u>\$5,500.00</u>
Total.....	\$14,500.00



*Wetland basin pre-treatment. USFWS Photo.*



*Wetland basin post treatment. USFWS Photo.*



*Removed Russian olive slash piles. USFWS photo.*

### **Project Example 3**

**HabITS ID:** 919693

**Project title:** CO-SE-15-006 River Canyon Ranch

**Date of final project completion:** 8/24/2015

**Project location details:** Las Animas County, Colorado

**Narrative summary of the project:**

There is a large cooperative of partners currently working on the upper portion of the Purgatoire River from the headwaters to Trinidad treating over 1400 acres to date. This landowner holds a large portion of the river and this project is a multiple stage effort. This project entails the restoration of a riparian corridor along the Purgatoire River, within a shortgrass prairie ecosystem. The riparian corridor is largely native in composition with a willow and cottonwood overstory and the presence of tamarisk as an invader. This year 20 acres of tamarisk was treated via mechanical removal. The ecological benefit will be improved water quality, stream condition, macro invertebrate production, as well as improved plant diversity. In this case, the goal is to allow for regeneration of the native willow/cottonwood composition. These improved conditions will provide benefit for migratory birds, native plains fishes, as well as short grass prairie dependent species. The Purgatoire River supports habitat for native plains fishes such as the Flathead Chub, which is a state species of concern. The mouth of the watershed also has habitat for the state endangered Suckermouth Minnow. Common amphibians inhabiting the watershed include the Northern Leopard Frog and Plains Leopard Frog which are both state species of concern and listed in the CDOW Wildlife Action Plan.

**Federal Trust Species:** mallard, Lewis woodpecker, long-billed curlew, great blue heron, blue-winged teal, northern and plains leopard frog, fathead minnow, suckermouth minnow, flathead chub, plains killifish

**Project Financials:**

CPW Wetlands Funds thru CO PFW .....	\$14,000.00
<u>Landowner.....</u>	<u>\$5,750.00</u>
<b>Project Total .....</b>	<b>\$19,750.00</b>



*Before invasive tamarisk removal. USFWS Photo.*



*Post tamarisk removal. USFWS Photo.*



*Post tamarisk removal. USFWS photo.*

## Project Example 4

**HabITS ID:** 758050

**Project title:** Wagner; CO-SLV-14-004

**Date of final project completion:** 12/05/2014

**Project location details:** Saguache County, Colorado

**Narrative summary of the project:**

The purpose of this project (located approximately 4 miles west of Villa Grove, CO) was to protect a 1.25 mile (6,610') section of riparian habitat along Kerber Creek and enhance 58 acres of the adjacent riparian corridor. Under this agreement, 58 acres along the Creek were fenced, excluding livestock grazing along the riparian corridor to allow the regeneration of native willow and other native tree & shrub species, including potential for narrowleaf cottonwood. This also protects previous restoration work which included in-stream structures, bank shaping, and erosion control as well as mine tailings treatment and abatement that was recently (Fall 2013) delivered through NRCS and the Kerber Creek Restoration Project. This riparian rest should increase new growth, density, and structural diversity of the native cottonwood/willow/alder community for a wide array of neotropical songbirds, including potential habitat for the Southwestern willow flycatcher.

**Federal Trust Species:** Yellow warbler, common yellowthroat, black-headed grosbeak

**Project Financials:**

CPW funds thru CO PFW .....	\$4,200.00
Landowner Cash.....	\$18,550.00
Landowner In-kind.....	\$5,000.00
NRCS.....	\$34,450.00
<u>Kerber Creek 319 Grant.....</u>	<u>\$290,703.00</u>
Total Restoration Costs.....	\$ 352,903.00



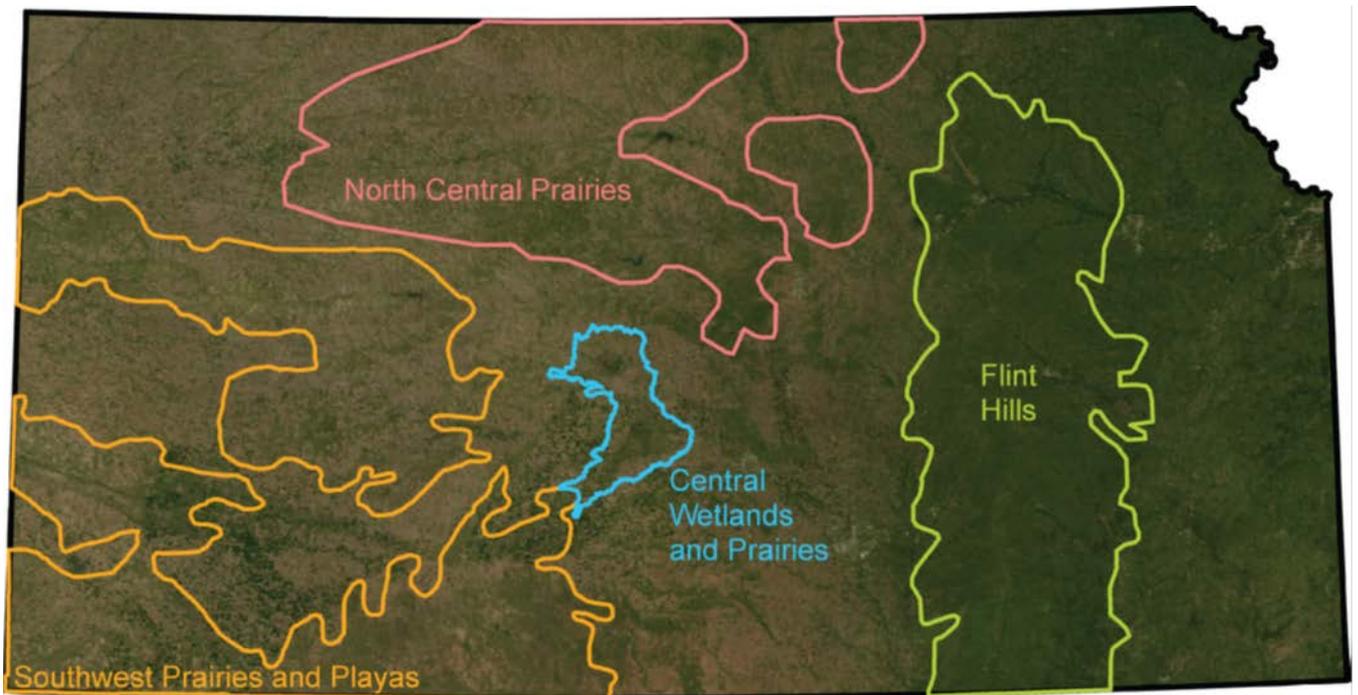
*Project Riparian Area Before Fence Installation- Photo by Corey Kanuckel, USFWSUSFWS Photo.*



*Completed riparian fence within PFW-funded project area. USFWS Photo.*

## Kansas Overview

In FY 2015 the Kansas PFW program, in cooperation with our many conservation stakeholders, continued to implement our 5 year strategic plan. FY 2015 was a great year for the Kansas PFW program. Using our strategic plan as a framework, we continued to provide high quality technical assistance and habitat improvements within our established focus areas, while also strengthening our partnerships and increasing program accountability. This narrative will give a review of FY 2015 accomplishments within our strategic focus areas and our coordinated conservation efforts across the state of Kansas.



*Kansas PFW program Focus Areas. USFWS Map.*

Mike Disney  
Kansas PFW Program State Coordinator  
2609 Anderson Avenue  
Manhattan, KS 66502  
785-539-3474  
michael\_disney@fws.gov

## Goal I. Conserve Habitat

In the fourth year of the Strategic Plan, the Kansas PFW program made substantial progress toward our 5-year goals. Working within our 4 focus areas, we restored, and enhanced wildlife habitat on private lands for designated Federal trust species while establishing and maintaining partnerships with conservation stakeholders across Kansas.

## Southwest Prairies and Playas Focus Area



*Native mixed-grass prairie. USFWS Photo.*

The Southwest Prairies and Playas Focus Area is a complex and diverse landscape composed of mixed-grass, shortgrass, sand prairie and sage-steppe that extend throughout western and south central Kansas. Portions of this focus area are also home to the highest densities of playa lakes in the state. Physiographic regions within this focus area include the Red Hills, the Smoky Hills, the Arkansas River Lowlands and the High Plains of Kansas.

The lesser prairie-chicken (LPC) is a grassland obligate species found within the Southwest Prairies and Playas Focus Area. This means that it requires large intact areas of native grasslands to survive. Historically, grassland fires were able to maintain these large intact areas of native grass by keeping woody invasive plant species in check. Over the last century, the lack of fire in the region has allowed the eastern red cedar to encroach on the landscape. Grasslands that contain even light densities of eastern redcedar become unsuitable for the LPC. These trees also capture water, shade grass, and generally conflict with grazing management practices. The Kansas PFW Program has funded the mechanical removal of eastern redcedar via cutting and clipping. These treatments followed by the use of periodic prescribed fire, have restored/enhanced thousands of acres of native prairie that benefit not only the LPC and other grassland obligate species but also the rancher and the communities they call home. On-the-ground conservation delivery in FY 2015 was strengthened through 2 new funding sources. Cooperative Recovery Initiative funds allowed large-scale lesser prairie-chicken conservation efforts. Additionally, Kansas PFW teamed up with the Comanche Pool Prairie Resource Foundation to harness National Fish and Wildlife Foundation Impact Directed Environmental Account funds to support habitat improvement projects and CPPRF outreach and education.

<b>Southwest Prairies and Playas Focus Area</b>			
<b>Habitat Type</b>	<b>FY 2015 Accomplishments</b>	<b>FY 2012-2016 Goal</b>	<b>% 5-year Goal Completed</b>
<b>Wetland (Acres)</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>349%</b>
<b>Upland (Acres)</b>	<b>7374</b>	<b>15000</b>	<b>116%</b>
<b>Riparian (Miles)</b>	<b>20.9</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1,985%</b>

### **North Central Prairies Focus Area**



*Native mixed-grass prairie. USFWS Photo.*

The North Central Kansas Prairies focus area is considered a transition zone between the Tallgrass and shortgrass prairies within the state. Tallgrass prairie is found on the eastern edge, mixed-grass in the middle and short-grass to the west. The Smoky Hills is the primary physiographic region within this focus area. This landscape still contains some large tracts of high quality Tallgrass and mixed-grass prairie that are used primarily for grazing. These native prairie pastures provide important seasonal habitat for migrating birds such as the Baird’s sparrow. They also provide crucial nesting and brood rearing habitat for grassland nesting birds such as the upland sandpiper, grasshopper sparrow and the greater prairie-chicken. Portions of this area contain some of the highest densities of greater prairie-chickens in the state. Threats of fragmentation and invasive species are a major concern. Proper grazing management systems and fire return intervals are two major conservation priorities in this area.

In concert with our many conversation partners, the Kansas PFW program has helped local ranchers organize to form multiple prescribed burn associations within the North Central Prairies Focus Area. Through these burn associations, member ranchers team up together to help each other implement prescribed burns on their associated ranches. This organized effort has allowed prescribe fire to return as a necessary disturbance that helps maintain the native plant community within the mixed grass prairies of this region. In FY2015 the Kansas PFW program continued to support and provide technical assistance to existing prescribed burn associations such as the Jewell County PBA in the North Central Prairies Focus Area.

<b>North Central Prairies Focus Area</b>			
<b>Habitat Type</b>	<b>FY 2015 Accomplishments</b>	<b>FY 2012-2016 Goal</b>	<b>% 5-year Goal Completed</b>
<b>Wetland (Acres)</b>	<b>20.5</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>149%</b>
<b>Upland (Acres)</b>	<b>3315</b>	<b>15000</b>	<b>75%</b>
<b>Riparian (Miles)</b>	<b>22.9</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1547%</b>

### **Flint Hills Focus Area**



*During the summer of FY 2015, FWS and NPS staff hosted a group of land managers and biologist from the Russian Steppe for a tour of the Flint Hills. USFWS Photo.*

The Tallgrass prairie is the most altered ecological community in North America. Of the 142 million acres that once covered the American heartland, less than 3% remain. The greater Flint Hills area of Kansas is by far the largest Tallgrass prairie landscape on the continent, with more acres remaining in Kansas than in all the other prairie states and provinces combined. The shallow soils and rough terrain managed to keep the plow and other disturbances to a minimum. Even so, a sizable portion of the Flint Hills has been degraded by invasive plants, urban sprawl, woody encroachment, and continued prairie fragmentation.

Like many other habitats that the Kansas PFW Program works to restore and enhance, the Flint Hills area suffers from the negative effects of invasive species. One of the primary invasive species that threatens the Flint Hills region is *Sericea lespedeza* (*Lespedeza cuneata*). This species is native to eastern Asia and was first introduced in the southern U.S. for soil stabilization and food/cover for bobwhite quail. This species has naturalized in Kansas and is listed as a noxious weed across the state. Managers have attempted to use various mechanical and chemical methods to control this species with little success. The Kansas PFW program has funded the use of spot spraying herbicide on areas where *Sericea lespedeza* is present. Follow-up treatments proper grazing and prescribed fire management. Time will tell if these efforts will prevail. The Kansas PFW program maintains an adaptive approach to its restoration efforts and uses the best available science to achieve the management objectives of both the cooperator and

the program. In FY15 the KS PFW program coordinated with researchers from Kansas State University to explore the effects of summer burning on *Sericea lespedeza*. The initial results are promising and may prove to be another tool in the toolbox for combating this invasive plant.

<b>Flint Hills Focus Area</b>			
<b>Habitat Type</b>	<b>FY 2015 Accomplishments</b>	<b>FY 2012-2016 Goal</b>	<b>% 5-year Goal Completed</b>
<b>Wetland (Acres)</b>	<b>7.4</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>155%</b>
<b>Upland (Acres)</b>	<b>4311</b>	<b>35000</b>	<b>166%</b>
<b>Riparian (Miles)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3600%</b>

### **Central Wetlands and Prairies Focus Area**



*Late spring in the Flint Hills of southern Kansas. USFWS photo.*

In central Kansas, the Arkansas River flows between the Smoky Hill River (to the north) and the Cimarron River (to the south). Over time, as the “Ark” (as it is called in Kansas) adjusted its course, it deposited vast amounts of sand and gravel creating a massive alluvial fan in the heart of the mixed-grass prairie of Kansas. These grass covered sand dunes associated with the river comprise the Great Bend Prairie. At the north end of this alluvial fan exists a unique geological phenomenon that includes closed depressional wetlands to create Cheyenne Bottoms to the north and Quivira National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) to the south. Both of these wetland complexes have been designated as RAMSAR Wetlands of International Importance.

Cheyenne Bottoms and Quivira NWR are jointly considered one of the eight wonders of Kansas. From shorebirds to waterfowl, these wetlands are considered one of the most important stopover points for a multitude of Federal trust species including the sandhill crane and Federally Endangered whooping crane. These wetlands also provide breeding habitat for the American avocet and black-necked stilt. The wetlands however, are not the only conservation priority in the area. The landscape surrounding both Cheyenne Bottoms and Quivira NWR include portions of the Great Bend Prairie. These grasslands support priority species such as the dickcissel, burrowing owl, short eared-owl and the upland sandpiper. Proper prairie management and

invasive species control are conservation priorities in this area. In FY 2015 KS PFW staff coordinated with Ducks Unlimited and USDA to work towards securing a potential conservation easement on an ecologically significant property neighboring Quivira NWR.

<b>Central Wetlands and Prairies Focus Area</b>			
<b>Habitat Type</b>	<b>FY 2015 Accomplishments</b>	<b>FY 2012-2016 Goal</b>	<b>% 5-year Goal Completed</b>
<b>Wetland (Acres)</b>	<b>6.6</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>228%</b>
<b>Upland (Acres)</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>1000</b>	<b>22%</b>
<b>Riparian (Miles)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>100%</b>

## **Project Example 1**

**HabITS ID:** 763466

**Project title:** PLA 64620-14-CA01

**Date of final completion:** FY 2015

**Project location details:** Southwest Prairies and Playas Focus Area

### **Narrative summary of the project:**

The primary objectives of this project were to enhance habitat conditions for aquatic and grassland-dependent wildlife species, improve rangeland health for livestock, and control invasive woody phreatophytes for restoration of structural and functional components of the Cimarron River watershed. Habitat enhanced via this project include a total of 3,453 upland acres, 46 wetland acres and 11.86 stream miles within the Red Hills of southwest Kansas.

The Kansas PFW Program provided technical expertise that lead to the design, and implementation of this project. This project was accomplished via coordination with the landowner and other conservation partners. The KS PFW program continues to monitor the success of the enhancement associated with this project using photo points and annual site visits to observe vegetation response to installed conservation practices.

Other conservation partners contributing to this project include the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resource Conservation Service's District Conservationist (NRCS), Kansas Department of Agriculture's State Weeds Specialist (KDA), Tamarisk Coalition, K-State Extension, Kansas Grazing Lands Coalition (KGLC), Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC), Cherokee Strip Prescribed Burn Association (PBA), Kansas Prescribed Fire Council's Southwest Regional Coordinator (KPFC).

Resource concerns addressed by this project were grazing management and encroachment of invasive eastern red cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*; ERC) and salt cedar (*Tamarix gallica*). Prescribed grazing management was enhanced through installation of electric cross-fencing within pastures. Cross fencing facilitates rotational grazing, benefiting grassland conditions for grassland obligate birds. Four pastures were subdivided into twelve paddocks, which will increase the rest period for each pasture by 50 to 75%. Increased rest will improve cover height for ground-nesting birds. Cross fencing will allow grazing management to improve utilization of forage, increase rest and recovery of rangeland, protect sensitive areas, improve water quality, control erosion, reduce noxious invasive weeds, build fuel as needed for prescribed burns, and create nesting and brood habitat for lesser prairie-chickens and other grassland birds. This project utilized a tamarisk biological control agent, the tamarisk leaf beetle (*Diorhabda carinata*), which has been found in Comanche, Clark and Meade Counties of southwestern Kansas. The Kansas Department of Agriculture, reports that the beetles have been found to be very successful at defoliating the tamarisk to the point of killing the trees after several years in other states. Because the insect moved into the state on its own and appears to be establishing stable, if not, expanding populations, the KDA has conducted an intensive capture and release program. The project site was utilized as a release site for 1,000 tamarisk leaf beetles. Salt cedar control via the tamarisk leaf beetle will be monitored and the project site will serve as a demonstration area for salt cedar control using this technique.

This agreement builds upon past conservation projects completed by KDWPT and the NRCS. This project has allowed the landowner to address a woody invasion problem, improve grazing distribution, and help improve the grassland and riparian ecosystems while maintaining an economically viable ranch.

**Federal trust species:** Arkansas darter, northern plains killifish, Arkansas River shiner, lesser prairie-chicken, grasshopper sparrow, burrowing owl, bobolink, ferruginous hawk, loggerhead shrike, and monarch butterfly.



*Landowner conducting prescribed burn. USFWS photo.*



*Project site in fore-ground demonstrating enhanced habitat.  
USFWS photo.*

## **Project Example 2**

**HabITS ID:** 742053

**Project title:** PLA 64610-14-SM05

**Date of final project completion:** FY 2015

**Project location details:** North Central Prairies Focus Area

### **Narrative summary of the project:**

This project is 1,527 acres of contiguous mixed grass prairie in Russell County, located in the southern region of the Kansas PFW North Central Prairies focus area. This site is located in close proximity to Wilson reservoir and borders Corps of Engineer property to the north. The prairie uplands have been impacted by fragmentation, seeing a gradual increase in invasive woody species over the years. Eastern redcedar (*Juniperous virginiana*) make up the vast majority of woody encroachment on this site. The Cooperator's goal is to improve the overall health of his grassland for long term benefits to their livelihood and the wildlife that utilize it. In order to accomplish this, the landowner will implement practices such as restoration through tree removal, prescribed fire, and a grazing management system.

Trees were mechanically removed by clipping or sawing. These efforts addressed a woody invasion problem at the project site but also improved the grassland ecosystem at a larger scale. The removal of these invasive trees and restoration of a native herbaceous prairie plant community aided in helping reduce soil erosion, improve water cycling, and further restored habitat for grassland and wetland species. Water quality will be improved to this site and downstream as well. With the close proximity to adjacent Corps of Engineers property (Wilson reservoir), this project will have an overall positive effect to the reservoir.

The cooperators will perform a prescribed burn at least once during the life of this agreement. In doing so, mowed fire breaks will be established in order to help accomplish this task. The cooperator plans to prescribe burn a different portion of this site every year and hopes to achieve a fire return interval of at once every 5 years. Timing will not be limited to the normal springtime burning window, allowing late summer burns to achieve desired results.

The landowner will establish a rotational grazing system through USDA's Natural Resource Conservation Service. The landowner will establish a six cell system utilizing electric cross fencing, waterline, and tanks cost shared through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

This project has allowed the landowner to improve the grassland ecosystem for livestock grazing and wildlife. Conservation practices delivered through this project will restore, enhance and maintain pollinator breeding and migrating habitat for species such as the monarch butterfly. Indirect benefits to migratory waterfowl and shorebirds, as well as numerous fish species will also benefit. This project is a joint effort between the landowner, The Kansas Grazing Lands Coalition, the Commission for Environmental Cooperation, USDA NRCS, and the FWS.

**Federal trust species:** Grasshopper sparrow, dickcissel, short-eared owl, upland sandpiper, red-headed woodpecker.



*Photos of the project site at the start of eastern redcedar removal (left) and after (right).  
USFWS photo.*



*Femonts Leatherplant (*Clematis fremontii*), a rare plant found after removal of eastern  
redcedar. USFWS photo.*

### **Project Example 3**

**HabITS ID:** 654504

**Project title:** PLA 64620-12-BT01

**Date of final project completion:** FY 2015

**Project location details:** Central Wetlands and Prairies Focus Area

#### **Narrative summary of the project:**

This project restored 60.6 acres of row crop agriculture land to 53.98 upland native prairie acres and 6.57 wetland acres. The site consisted of Sodic Claypan and Saline Subirrigated ecological sites with Kisiwa loam and Punkin silt loam soils and seasonal wetlands. The project was completed in partnership with the Kansas Grazing Lands Coalition (KGLC), Kansas Department of Wildlife Parks and Tourism (KDWPT), and The Nature Conservancy (TNC) on their 8,000-acre Cheyenne Bottoms Preserve, which borders KDWPT's 19,857-acre Cheyenne Bottoms. Additionally, the project is 15 miles north of Quivira NWR, a member of the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network and, along with Cheyenne Bottoms, a RAMSAR Wetland of International Importance. This region is within a bottleneck of the central flyway. These wetlands are considered one of the most important stopovers for waterfowl, shorebirds and the endangered whooping crane. They provide breeding habitat for least tern, snowy plover, American avocet and black-necked stilt. Additionally, numerous arctic breeding birds rely on the region, such as semipalmated sandpiper, Baird's sandpiper, buff-breasted sandpiper, stilt sandpiper and many others. Moreover, the wetland is in the center of the whooping crane migration corridor for the last wild population that travels between their breeding grounds in Wood Buffalo National Park Canada, Northwest Territories and adjacent areas of Alberta and wintering areas along the Gulf Coast and Aransas NWR.

Project practices were wetland sediment removal, native range planting, cross-fencing, and prescribed grazing. Sediment was removed from 4 scattered wetland basins and 2 drainage ditches were plugged to restore natural hydrology of wetlands. Wetland renovations were completed and over 500 waterfowl, predominantly northern pintails and mallards, were observed during a site visit the following winter. PFW biologist provided guidance on wetland specifications and monitored water depths and plant production. Blue-winged teal and mallards nested in the area the following spring.

A native prairie seed mix was developed by PFW and TNC and upland areas surrounding wetlands were planted with a no-till drill. PFW monitored grassland restoration efforts and made recommendations for management during stand development. Fencing was constructed on the north and west boundaries to incorporate future livestock grazing after stand development. Pre-existing fence to the south and east was removed in order to join the project to additional grassland grazing acreage. The upland and wetland native plant communities have been productive and diverse. Monarch butterflies were recorded utilizing the area during a site visit in October 2014, the same day that over 160 white-faced ibis were gorging themselves on crawfish and inverts. Grassland birds of concern, such as upland sandpiper, meadowlarks and grasshopper sparrows, were quick to utilize the new grassland acres.

In the future, the property will be added to a rotational grazing program and will be managed with mechanical techniques and prescribed burns to control woody and invasive species encroachment.

The Nature Conservancy has reached out to PFW to partner on converting additional row crop land bordering the project to prairies and wetlands. This project was a joint effort between TNC, KGLC, KDWPT and the FWS.

**Federal trust species:** Snowy plover, whooping crane, least tern, northern pintail, upland sandpiper, American avocet, American bittern, black-necked stilt, grasshopper sparrow, western meadowlark, bobolink, ferruginous hawk, and loggerhead shrike.



*Photos of the project site before (left) and after restoration (right). USFWS photos.*



*Waterfowl and pollinator use after the project was completed. USFWS photos.*

## **Project Example 4**

**HabITS ID:** 720435

**Project title:** PLA 64860-A-C002

**Date of final project completion:** FY 2015

**Project location details:** Flint Hills Focus Area

### **Narrative summary of the project:**

This project is 241 acres and lies along the northern edge of the Flint Hills region of Northeastern Kansas. The site lies directly adjacent to Konza Prairie Natural Research Area. Konza Prairie is approximately 8,600 acres and is owned by the Nature Conservancy. It is designated as a Long-Term Ecological Research (LTER) property which is a comprehensive ecological research, education and outreach program managed by Kansas State University and utilized by researchers from all over the world. In addition, this project lies within the USFWS's Flint Hills Legacy Conservation Area and the Partners for Fish & Wildlife Program's Flint Hills Focus Area. The vegetation on this project is dominated by native tallgrass prairie along the ridge tops which transitions into oak-hickory woodland as you move off the ridges and down toward the draws and riparian areas. One perennial unnamed tributary to McDowell Creek dissects the property. Over the past several years the ridge tops had seen an increase in the degree of tree invasion and was described as medium in the uplands to heavy as you approach the draws. The goal of this agreement was to remove as many trees as possible from the project area starting on the tops of the hills and working towards the woodland edges of the project area. This was accomplished using a combination of clipping, chain sawing, piling, prescribed burning and spot spraying to control resprouting of cut trees and brush. The removal of trees and brush visually open up the grasslands and in-turn allowed for better nesting, roosting, and brooding habitat for Henslow's sparrows and other grassland nesting birds. Proper stocking rates were maintained to help: reduce grazing pressure on the riparian areas, provide nesting, roosting, and brooding habitat for the Henslow's sparrow and other grassland bird species and to improve the nutrient cycling within the native prairie plant community. Furthermore, the utilization of spot spraying techniques minimized damage to the native forb community ensured quality habitat for pollinators such as the monarch butterfly. This project assisted the Cooperators and their family in controlling their woody invasion problems along with helping to improve the grassland ecosystem while maintaining an economically viable operation.

**Federal trust species:** Henslow's sparrow, other grassland birds, and monarch butterfly.



*Butterfly Milkweed is commonly found in the Flint Hills of Kansas and provides excellent habitat for a wide variety of pollinators including the monarch butterfly.*



*Milkweed colonies, such as this whorled milkweed colony, would disappear without the control of invasive trees. Note the woody invasion in the background. USFWS photo.*

## Goal II. Broaden and Strengthen Partnerships

During FY 2015 the Kansas PFW program continued to deliver PLAs through a cooperative agreement with the Kansas Grazing Lands Coalition (KGLC). The KGLC is a rancher driven organization whose mission is “To regenerate Kansas grazing land resources through cooperative management, economics, ecology, production, education, and technical assistance programs.” The KGLC is comprised of local grazing groups such as the Comanche Pool Prairie Resource Foundation, The Tallgrass Legacy Alliance, and the Smoky Hills Grazers. The Kansas PFW Focus Areas not only represent high priority areas for Federal Trust Species and their habitats, they also coincide with most of the KGLC grazing groups. In FY 2015, the Kansas PFW program was able to take advantage of funds from an active Cooperative Agreement with the KGLC as well as a grant funds from the Cooperative Recovery Initiative, NFWF Monarch fund and NFWF IDEA funds. FY 15 PLAs included the removal of invasive species, the use of prescribe fire, and fencing improvements and livestock watering facilities to enhance grazing management plans to benefit Federal Trust Species.

As part of a joint funding effort between KS PFW, KGLC and the Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC). A spring 2015 CEC board meeting (including Canadian and Mexican ranchers) was held in Kansas. The meeting included a tour of KS PFW funded projects across the state and an incredible opportunity to discuss conservation priorities/opportunities with stakeholders across North, South and Central America. See the image below of the tour participants.



*Kansas private landowners, members of the Kansas Grazing Lands Coalition, NRCS staff, and PFW staff stop for a break while touring conservation projects throughout Kansas. USFWS photo.*

FY 2015 was an incredible year for the Kansas PFW program to showcase habitat conservation delivery across Kansas. Along with the tour for the CEC Steering Committee, the Kansas PFW program also hosted HQ PFW Staff, the Region 6 Regional Directorate Team, and the Region 6 PFW Coordinator and Deputy Coordinator for project tours across the state. Each site along the tours included introductions to local landowners and conservation partners such as USDA NRCS, KDWPT, TNC, KGLC and NPS.

<b>Southwest Prairies and Playas Focus Area</b>			
<b>Accomplishment Type</b>	<b>2015 Accomplishment</b>	<b>2012-2016 Goal</b>	<b>% Goal Completed</b>
# New Partners	6	40	75%
# TA staff Days	50	125	140%
			<b>Cumulative %</b>
Percentage of Leveraging	68%	58% landowners and inkind	51%
	27%	34% Service Funds	47%
	5%	5% Other Partners	2%
	0%	3% KDWPT	0%

<b>North Central Prairies Focus Area</b>			
<b>Accomplishment Type</b>	<b>2015 Accomplishment</b>	<b>2012-2016 Goal</b>	<b>% Goal Completed</b>
# New Partners	4	40	98%
# TA staff Days	40	75	186%
			<b>Cumulative %</b>
Percentage of Leveraging	44%	40% landowners and inkind	51%
	66%	40% Service Funds	39%
	0%	20% Other Partners	10%

<b>Flint Hills Focus Area</b>			
<b>Accomplishment Type</b>	<b>2015 Accomplishment</b>	<b>2012-2016 Goal</b>	<b>% Goal Completed</b>
# New Partners	6	50	74%
# TA staff Days	50	125	164%
			<b>Cumulative %</b>
Percentage of Leveraging	43%	33% landowners and inkind	56%
	57%	33% Service Funds	42%
	0%	14% Other Partners	2%
	0%	20% Grants	0%

<b>Central Wetlands and Prairies Focus Area</b>			
<b>Accomplishment Type</b>	<b>2015 Accomplishment</b>	<b>2012-2016 Goal</b>	<b>% Goal Completed</b>
# New Partners	1	8	225%
# TA staff Days	20	40	183%
			<b>Cumulative %</b>
Percentage of Leveraging	66% 33% 0%	40% landowners and inkind 40% Service Funds 20% Other Partners	48% 52% 0%

### **Goal III. Improve Information Sharing and Communication**

<b>Accomplishment Type</b>	<b>2015 Accomplishment</b>	<b>2012-2016 Goal</b>	<b>% Goal Completed</b>
Workshops	10	45	122%
Media Events	5	10	170%
Semi-Annual Coordination Meetings w/ USDA NRCS	2	10	80%
Sponsored Ranch Tours	8	15	153%

### **Goal IV. Enhance our Workforce**

The Kansas PFW Program staff is required to have a vast knowledge of many different disciplines. Kansas, like many other states, is a very complex state with the need to understand local ecology, geology, hydrology, sociology and economics to work with our diverse partners. Our dedicated staff embraces the challenge and does an outstanding job continuing to learn new concepts and techniques. Our FY 2015 activities are listed below:

- Spend 40 hours in another Kansas PFW program biologist's area  
*Objective met*
- Work with Kansas PFW staff to update Individual Development Plans  
*Objective met*
- Schedule pertinent training for the most recent habitat restoration techniques  
*In process*
- Semi-annual state-wide staff meetings to provide updates, issues of concern, and guest speakers.  
*Objective met*
- Annual award recognition for outstanding accomplishments  
*Objective met*

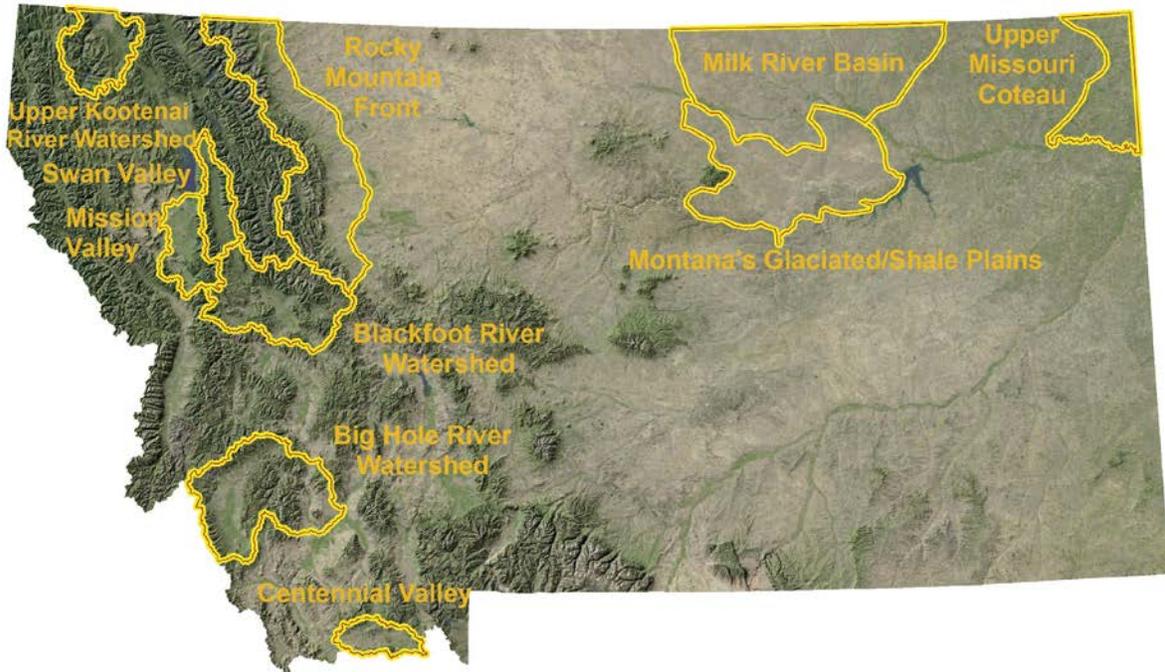
## Goal V. Increase Accountability

The Kansas PFW program delivers technical assistance to cooperators across the state. Each PLA receives funding based on criteria pertaining to its location within a defined focus areas, overall benefit to Federal Trust Species, benefit to Kansas Species of Concern and proximity to National Wildlife Refuges. The Kansas PFW Program has set measurable targets that will enable the program to increase overall accountability for funded PLAs. To measure accountability the Kansas PFW program worked towards the following objectives:

- Increase photos of projects within HabITS by 10%  
*Objective met*
- Provide summary updates to partners at Semi-annual coordination meeting  
*Objective met*
- Work with Service-Habitat and Population Evaluation Team (HAPET) office to develop Kansas PFW program Geographic Information Systems (GIS) database  
*In Process*
- Work with Universities and extension service to increase monitoring and reporting of research on PFW restoration sites.  
*Objective met*

## Montana Overview

The Montana (MT) PFW Program had another great year in FY15 thanks to our partners and landowners. The program implemented impressive conservation projects and helped coordinate important outreach/in-reach events. We continued to make progress toward our 5 year habitat goals and broadening partnerships and enhancing accountability. As in past years, the dedication, creativity and vision of MT PFW field biologists played a major role in these successes.



*Montana PFW program Focus Areas. USFWS Map.*

Greg Neudecker  
Montana PFW Program State Coordinator  
USFWS Upsata Lake Office  
PO Box 66  
Ovando, MT 59854  
406-7937400

Personnel changes during FY 2015: Marisa Sather joined the staff as a Pathways Employee in November. She finished her Ph.D. on grassland birds in May of 2015 at the University of Montana. Her Ph. D thesis was titled “Cows and plows: science-based conservation for grassland songbirds in agricultural landscapes.” She started working full time in June. She is now located in Glasgow, MT and is focused on greater sage-grouse and declining grassland bird conservation projects.

Advancing Strategic Habitat Conservation and Surrogate Species: During 2015, the MT PFW Program continued implementing the third generation of our Strategic Plan covering 2012-2016.

This comprehensive, multi-step approach has really begun to take hold in Montana by our many conservation partners. We completed our first monitoring plan this year. In FY16 we plan to start on a new update of our strategic plan that will also include an update of our monitoring plan, so that in the future they will be updated together every 5 years.

The following narrative, photos, and tables show the results of this approach over the last year. For 2015, the MT PFW Program worked with 43 landowners to restore over 272 wetland acres, 10 miles of in-stream/riparian habitat, 7,289 upland acres and 10 fish passage projects.

### **Goal I. Conserve Habitat**

Progress in meeting our 5-year strategic plan habitat targets for the State of Montana and within each individual conservation focus area are summarized below.

<b>Montana</b>			
<b>Habitat Type</b>	<b>FY 2015 Accomplishments</b>	<b>FY 2012-2016 Goal</b>	<b>% 5-year Goal Completed</b>
<b>Wetland (Acres)</b>	<b>272</b>	<b>1985</b>	<b>224%</b>
<b>Upland (Acres)</b>	<b>7289</b>	<b>44,440</b>	<b>103%</b>
<b>Riparian (Miles)</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>121</b>	<b>79%</b>
<b>Fish Passage (Units)</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>91%</b>

<b>BIG HOLE RIVER WATERSHED</b>			
<b>Habitat Type</b>	<b>FY 2015 Accomplishments</b>	<b>FY 2012-2016 Goal</b>	<b>% 5-year Goal Completed</b>
<b>Wetland (Acres)</b>		<b>110</b>	<b>1275%</b>
<b>Upland (Acres)</b>		<b>12,000</b>	<b>11%</b>
<b>Riparian (Miles)</b>	<b>7.2</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>122%</b>
<b>Fish Passage (Units)</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>170%</b>

<b>BLACKFOOT RIVER WATERSHED</b>			
<b>Habitat Type</b>	<b>FY 2015 Accomplishments</b>	<b>FY 2012-2016 Goal</b>	<b>% 5-year Goal Completed</b>
<b>Wetland (Acres)</b>		<b>150</b>	<b>65%</b>
<b>Upland (Acres)</b>		<b>2800</b>	<b>150%</b>
<b>Riparian (Miles)</b>	<b>0.1</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Fish Passage (Units)</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>75%</b>

<b>ROCKY MOUNTAIN FRONT</b>			
<b>Habitat Type</b>	<b>FY 2015 Accomplishments</b>	<b>FY 2012-2016 Goal</b>	<b>% 5-year Goal Completed</b>
<b>Wetland (Acres)</b>		<b>75</b>	<b>70%</b>
<b>Upland (Acres)</b>	<b>1056</b>	<b>4000</b>	<b>122%</b>
<b>Riparian (Miles)</b>		<b>6</b>	<b>13%</b>
<b>Fish Passage (Units)</b>		<b>0</b>	

<b>UPPER KOOTENAI RIVER WATERSHED</b>			
<b>Habitat Type</b>	<b>FY 2015 Accomplishments</b>	<b>FY 2012-2016 Goal</b>	<b>% 5-year Goal Completed</b>
<b>Wetland (Acres)</b>	<b>*</b>	<b>50</b>	
<b>Upland (Acres)</b>		<b>1500</b>	<b>10%</b>
<b>Riparian (Miles)</b>		<b>18</b>	<b>5%</b>
<b>Fish Passage (Units)</b>		<b>3</b>	<b>166%</b>

\*no biologist is working in this focus area

<b>UPPER MISSOURI COTEAU</b>			
<b>Habitat Type</b>	<b>FY 2015 Accomplishments</b>	<b>FY 2012-2016 Goal</b>	<b>% 5-year Goal Completed</b>
<b>Wetland (Acres)</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>500</b>	<b>31%</b>
<b>Upland (Acres)</b>	<b>740</b>	<b>7500</b>	<b>10%</b>
<b>Riparian (Miles)</b>		<b>2</b>	
<b>Fish Passage (Units)</b>		<b>0</b>	

<b>SWAN VALLEY</b>			
<b>Habitat Type</b>	<b>FY 2015 Accomplishments</b>	<b>FY 2012-2016 Goal</b>	<b>% 5-year Goal Completed</b>
<b>Wetland (Acres)</b>	<b>12.1</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>31%</b>
<b>Upland (Acres)</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>640</b>	<b>1%</b>
<b>Riparian (Miles)</b>		<b>8</b>	<b>4%</b>
<b>Fish Passage (Units)</b>		<b>4</b>	

<b>GLACIATED/SHALE PLAINS</b>			
<b>Habitat Type</b>	<b>FY 2015 Accomplishments</b>	<b>FY 2012-2016 Goal</b>	<b>% 5-year Goal Completed</b>
<b>Wetland (Acres)</b>	<b>213</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>101%</b>
<b>Upland (Acres)</b>	<b>2776</b>	<b>5000</b>	<b>58%</b>
<b>Riparian (Miles)</b>		<b>5</b>	
<b>Fish Passage (Units)</b>		<b>0</b>	

<b>MILK RIVER BASIN</b>			
<b>Habitat Type</b>	<b>FY 2015 Accomplishments</b>	<b>FY 2012-2016 Goal</b>	<b>% 5-year Goal Completed</b>
<b>Wetland (Acres)</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>244%</b>
<b>Upland (Acres)</b>	<b>781</b>	<b>1000</b>	<b>1222%</b>
<b>Riparian (Miles)</b>		<b>5</b>	
<b>Fish Passage (Units)</b>		<b>0</b>	

<b>MISSION VALLEY</b>			
<b>Habitat Type</b>	<b>FY 2015 Accomplishments</b>	<b>FY 2012-2016 Goal</b>	<b>% 5-year Goal Completed</b>
<b>Wetland (Acres)</b>		<b>350</b>	<b>6%</b>
<b>Upland (Acres)</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2500</b>	<b>2%</b>
<b>Riparian (Miles)</b>		<b>15</b>	<b>48%</b>
<b>Fish Passage (Units)</b>		<b>3</b>	<b>366%</b>

<b>CENTENNIAL VALLEY</b>			
<b>Habitat Type</b>	<b>FY 2015 Accomplishments</b>	<b>FY 2012-2016 Goal</b>	<b>% 5-year Goal Completed</b>
<b>Wetland (Acres)</b>	<b>2.2</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>1148%</b>
<b>Upland (Acres)</b>		<b>7500</b>	<b>160%</b>
<b>Riparian (Miles)</b>		<b>5</b>	<b>180%</b>
<b>Fish Passage (Units)</b>		<b>5</b>	

## **Project Example 1**

**HabITS ID:** 764157

**Project title:** Swamp Creek Siphon Project

**Date of project completion:** FY 2015

**Project location details:** Big Hole Focus Area

### **Narrative summary of the project:**

The purpose of this project was to remove a fish passage barrier that will provide access to 12 stream miles, improve instream flow for 6 miles downstream and reduce entrainment of Arctic grayling into an irrigation canal. This project installed a siphon to transport canal water underneath Swamp Creek near Wisdom, MT. Swamp Creek is one of the most productive and important tributaries for Arctic grayling in the Big Hole watershed. Prior to the project, Swamp Creek flowed into the large canal and an irrigation diversion acted as a barrier and increased the potential for entrainment into the canal. The siphon will improve instream flows six miles downstream of the canal, provide fish passage to access 12 stream miles upstream of the canal, and decrease the potential entrainment of fishes into the canal. The siphon is a High Density Polyethylene Pipe (63" x 150 linear feet) with an overflow weir and trash rack. The project is part of the landowner's site-specific plan (SSP) for the Big Hole Arctic Grayling Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances program. The project was a collaborative effort with multiple funding sources and partners including, landowners and water rights holder, Montana, Fish Wildlife & Parks, Arctic Grayling Recovery Program, USFWS Fish Passage Initiative grant, Beaverhead County Conservation District, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, Big Hole River Foundation, Montana Pennsylvania Power and Light (now Northwest energy).

**Federal Trust Species:** Arctic grayling



*During construction for siphon inlet. Siphon is 63" diameter x 125 feet long. USFWS photo.*



*Inlet of siphon just after construction. Note willow with red dot for reference. USFWS photo.*

## **Project Example 2**

**HabITS ID:** 985476

**Project title:** Sather Grassland Restoration Project

**Date of project completion:** FY 2015

**Project location details:** Milk River Basin Focus Area

### **Narrative summary of the project:**

This project restored 176 acres of native grass on a field that has been farmed for several decades. This project site is surrounded by high quality native prairie tracts and abuts a large landscape of some of the best native mixed grass prairie remaining in the United States (Cooper et al. 2001). The area surrounding this project represents the core of the distribution for several grassland songbirds including Sprague's pipit, Baird's Sparrow, McCown's longspur, and chestnut-collared longspur. It also falls into a greater sage-grouse priority area for conservation. The landscape is dominated by Bureau of Land Management and State DNRC lands, with scattered private inholdings like this parcel. The field was seeded with a native grass species and forb mixture. The site was in wheat stubble, which facilitated the replanting of native grass seed because most weeds had been controlled by farming practices. Grass seed was planted by the landowner with the farm's equipment.

Sprague's pipit and other declining grassland songbird species are inextricably linked to intact native prairie. Pipits are widely known to breed, nest and raise their young in large tracts of mixed-grass prairie while actively avoiding lands converted to crop, tame grass, hay, and other non-grassland edges (Davis et al. 1999, Davis 2004, Davis et al. 2006, Fisher and Davis 2011b, Fisher and Davis 2011a, Sliwinski and Koper 2012, Davis et al. 2013). Restoration of native grasslands in north central Montana is paramount to the recovery and stabilization of population declines for pipits and other grassland species of concern. Further, the biological benefit of restoration is maximized when it takes place in landscapes already dominated by high quality native grassland habitat (Lipsev 2015). For example, this parcel may have up to three times the value for pipits than a similar parcel would have within a fragmented landscape. This ranch is currently engaged in a grazing management plan that will ensure high quality grassland habitat for a full suite of native grassland songbirds as well as greater sage-grouse.

## Goal II. Broaden and Strengthen Partnerships

Robust conservation delivery relies on productive partnerships. The MT PFW staff is fully engaged in strengthening partnerships. Key partners include, Private Landowners, MFWP, TNC, TU, DU, PF, The Arctic Grayling Recovery Program, Blackfoot Challenge, Partners for Conservation, Big Hole Watershed Committee, Rancher Stewardship Alliance, Swan Ecosystem Center, Rocky Mountain Front Weed Round-table, NRCS, county conservation districts, Native American tribes and numerous private foundations.

We aggressively seek new funding opportunities. FY15, we attracted a couple of new funding partners for our work as well as continued support from many existing partners: Brainerd Foundation and, Kresge Foundation, EPA, MTFWP, MT DEQ, Ducks Unlimited, Defenders of Wildlife, Park County, Chutney Foundation, Blackfoot Challenge, the National Forest Foundation, Montana Association of Conservation Districts, Montana State University, Cinnabar Foundation and American Wildlands to name a few.

<b>Accomplishment Type</b>	<b>FY2015</b>	<b>2012-2016 Goal</b>	<b>%Completed</b>
<b># of Landowner Agreements</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>54%</b>
<b>Staff Days of Technical Assistance</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>1225</b>	<b>87%</b>
<b>% of non-FWS funds leveraged</b>	<b>1.85</b>	<b>1:1.7/year</b>	

## Goal III. Improve Information Sharing and Communication

The FY2015 Information Sharing and Communication accomplishments are summarized below. We believe that on-the-ground conservation delivery and strong partnerships are tied to rigorous internal and external communication. USFWS and DOI leadership appear to support this premise based on the number of requests we receive for field tours, high-level briefings, meetings, workshops and media events. Highlights from 2015 include a visit by the FWS Directorate and representatives from AFWA to hear about FWS/state partnerships and to see habitat restoration and conservation first hand. In addition, the Blackfoot Valley focus area also hosted international guests from Russia, Mongolia and France. International guests were primarily interested in public/private partnerships and dealing with wildlife conflicts.

<b>Accomplishment Type</b>	<b>2015 Accomplishment</b>	<b>2012-2016 Goal</b>	<b>% Goal Completed</b>
<b>Participate in Landowner meetings</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>80%</b>
<b>Enter into new Coop Agreements</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>67%</b>
<b>Sponsor Landowner tours</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>120%</b>
<b>Assist in NCTC Courses as instructors</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>120%</b>
<b>Host MFWP Coordination Meetings</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>120%</b>
<b>Participate in NRCS State Tech. Com. mtgs.</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>50%</b>
<b>Participate in Congressional Mtgs./Tours</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>80%</b>
<b>Provide MT PFW Program Updates to WO &amp; RO Staff</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>80%</b>
<b>Conduct MT PFW Staff Meetings</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>80%</b>
<b>Facilitate media events</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>60%</b>
<b>Complete school field trips</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>80%</b>



*Greg Neudecker and David Mannix, Blackfoot Valley Landowner, talk with members of the FWS directorate and state agency directors during a tour of the valley in May. USFWS photo.*

### Goal IV. Enhance Our Workforce

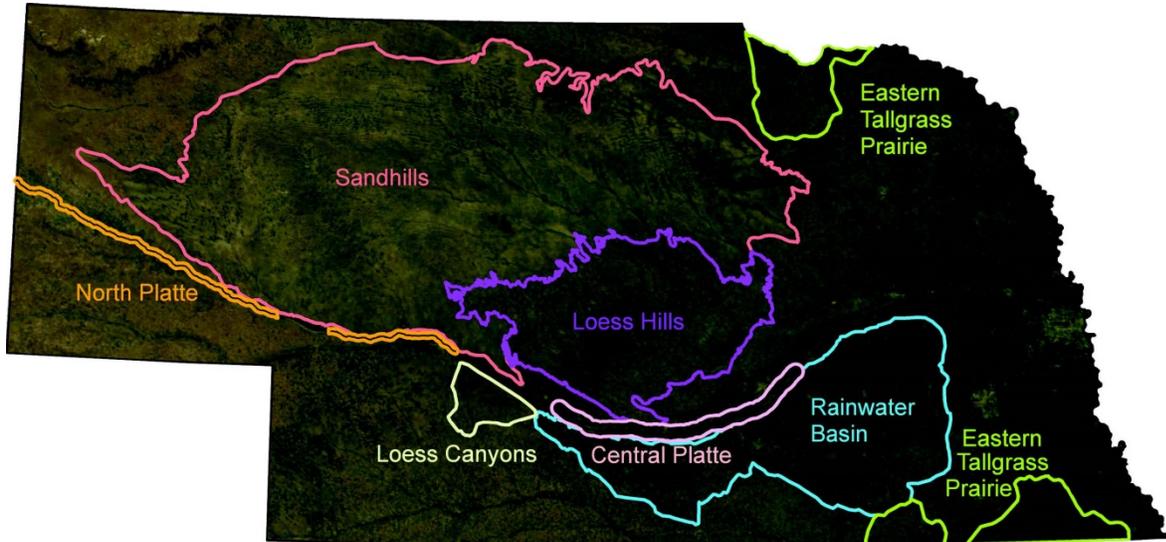
<b>Accomplishment Type</b>	<b>2015 Accomplishment</b>	<b>2012-2016 Goal</b>	<b>% Goal Completed</b>
MT PFW field staff acquire 40 hours of training/yr.	All MT PFW field staff completed at least 40 hrs. of training/year	40 hrs./year/employee	100%
Staff and mentor new field biologists in the Glaciated Shale Plains and Swan River Valley	Position filled at Glasgow.	2 new positions	150%
Recognize exceptional MT PFW Program field staff	4 MT PFW staff members were recognized for exemplary performance in FY15	NA	

### Goal V. Increase Accountability

<b>Accomplishment Type</b>	<b>2015 Accomplishment</b>	<b>2012-2016 Goal</b>	<b>% Goal Completed</b>
By 2015 develop site specific plans for each staffed MT PFW Focus Area	1	5	60%
Use GIS technology to map MT PFW projects	All FY15 projects were mapped	All	100%
Create GIS layer of all MT PFW habitat projects by 2012	Not completed		
By 2017, conduct one peer reviewed biological assessment of each MT PFW Focus Area	None completed		

## Nebraska Overview

The Nebraska PFW program (NE PFW) continued to flourish during FY 2015 thanks to the 60 private landowners who voluntarily entered into landowner agreements with the Service and our numerous conservation partners to restore, enhance, manage, and conserve habitat for Federal trust species. In addition, substantial progress was also made during this past year towards meeting our five-year targets for: (a) building and strengthening partnerships; (b) improving information sharing and communication; (c) enhancing our workforce; and (d) increasing accountability.



*Nebraska PFW program Focus Areas. USFWS Map.*

Kenny Dinan  
Nebraska PFW Program State Coordinator  
9325 South Alda Road  
Wood River, NE 68883  
308-382-6468 ext. 214

## Goal I. Conserve Habitat

Implementing habitat restoration projects in high priority landscapes or watersheds continued to be the primary emphases of the NE PFW program. The NE PFW program worked closely with our diverse group of conservation partners to identify, prioritize, and implement habitat restoration projects within the following conservation focus areas identified in the PFW 2012-2016 Strategic Plan: (1) Rainwater Basin, (2) Central Platte River, (3) Sandhills, (4) North Platte River, (5) Loess Canyons, (6) Loess Hills and Loup River Systems, and (7) Eastern Tallgrass Prairies.



*NE PFW FY 2015 project located in the Sandhills Focus Area along the Birdwood Creek in Lincoln, County, Nebraska. USFWS photo.*

During FY 2015, 60 new Private Landowner Agreements (PLAs) were entered into with private landowners throughout Nebraska. The 60 new projects resulted in the restoration and/or enhancement of approximately 3,830 acres of wetland/wet meadow habitat; 10,521 acres of native upland and lowland grassland habitat; 8.0 miles of stream/riparian habitat; 1.67 miles of riverine habitat; and 6.76 miles of wetland sloughs, backwaters, and side channel habitat. Fifty-five of the 60 projects (91.7%) were located in NE PFW conservation focus areas.



*NE PFW project located in the North Platte River Focus Area near Paxton NE. Wetland restored in 1998 and photo taken March 2015. USFWS photo.*

<b>Nebraska PFW FY 2015 Accomplishments</b>					
	<b>Wetland/Wet Meadow Habitat (Acres)</b>	<b>Upland Habitat (Acres)</b>	<b>Riverine/ Stream/ Riparian Habitat (Miles)</b>	<b>Riverine Slough Habitat (Miles)</b>	<b>Partners/ Projects (# PLAs)</b>
<b>Rainwater Basins</b>	536	126	N/A	N/A	13
<b>Central Platte River</b>	388	0	0.71	4.76	7
<b>Sandhills</b>	1,362	413	1.4	0	10
<b>North Platte River</b>	1,075	465	1.95	2.0	8
<b>Loess Canyons</b>	0	5,668	N/A	N/A	10
<b>Loess Hills/ Loup Rivers</b>	10	0	0.25	0	1
<b>Eastern Tallgrass Prairies</b>	0	3,079	N/A	N/A	6
Platte River/Snake Creek	459	0	5.36	0	2
Ponca Bluffs/ Missouri River	0	770	0	0	3
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>3,830</b>	<b>10,521</b>	<b>9.67</b>	<b>6.76</b>	<b>60</b>

The above table shows a summary of FY 2015 habitat accomplishments and the following sections provide a brief description of habitat accomplishments by NE PFW conservation focus area. The tables that follow show FY 2015 habitat accomplishments, 5-year goal, and the percentages of the 5-year goal that has been completed through year 4 for each of Nebraska's conservation focus area.

### **Rainwater Basin Focus Area**

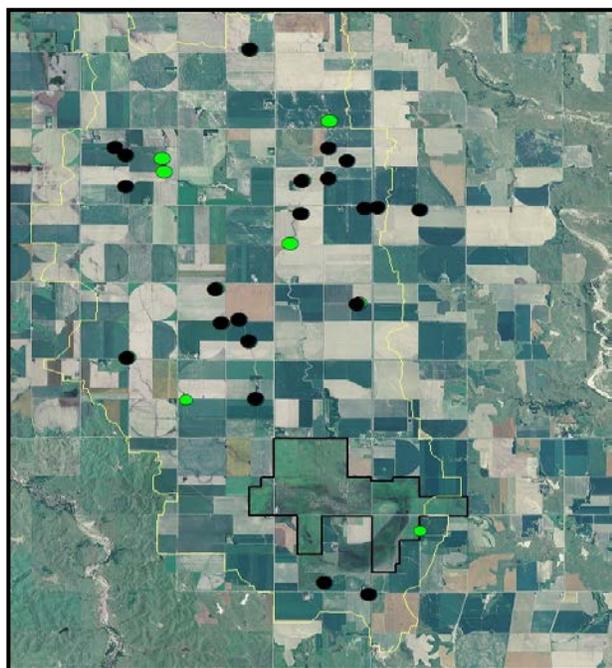
The restoration and enhancement of Rainwater Basin (RWB) wetlands for the benefit of the endangered whooping crane and numerous migratory waterbirds remains a high priority for the NE PFW program. Restoration and enhancement activities conducted within the RWB included fencing, well development, filling pits, sediment removal, and management of invasive species. Thirteen new agreements were initiated with private landowners in 2015 resulting in the restoration of 536 acres of wetland and 126 acres of upland habitat. Wetland and upland acres were also restored, enhanced, and managed in conjunction with the Wetland Restoration,

Revolving Lands, and Working Lands Programs. Acres of wetland and upland habitat restored and number of irrigation reuse pits filled, met or exceeded annual targets.

<b>Rainwater Basin Focus Area</b>				
<b>Habitat Type</b>	<b>FY 2015 Accomplishment</b>	<b>2012-2015 Accomplishment (4 years)</b>	<b>FY 2012-2016 Goal</b>	<b>% 5-year Goal Completed</b>
<b>Wetland (Acres)</b>	536	3,091	1,825	169%
<b>Upland (Acres)</b>	126	700	250	280%
<b>Pits Filled (#)</b>	8	90	40	225%
<b>Partners/Projects (PLAs)</b>	13	91	50	180%

During FY 2015, a priority for the NE PFW program continued to be the restoration of watersheds associated with perpetually protected RWB wetlands. The 13 new agreements entered into during FY 2015, resulted in the filling of 8 pits located in the watershed of 4 perpetually protected RWB wetlands (Funk WPA, Cottonwood WPA, Youngson WPA, and Biester WRP).

Using funding provided by NE PFW, Service’s Cooperative Recovery Initiative, RWB Joint Venture, and a diverse group of partners, numerous projects were implemented. Watershed and wetland restoration projects such as those completed during 2015, ensure long-term hydrologic restoration of migration stopover sites and provide critically important migration habitat for whooping cranes, waterfowl, and other Federal trust species.



The image to the left shows the watershed of Macon Lakes WPA. This project involved 18 different landowners and thus far has resulted in the filling of 21 of the 26 pits located within the watershed. Black dots are filled pits and green dots are pits that will be filled in the near future.

The goal of this initiative is to contribute toward the recovery of whooping cranes by conserving stopover habitat and achieving objectives identified in the PFW 2012-2016 Strategic Plan, Whooping Crane Recovery

Plan, RWBJV Implementation Plan, RWB-WMD CCP, and State Wildlife Action Plan.

## Central Platte River Focus Area

The central Platte River is a high priority conservation focus area for the NE PFW program and is a significantly important area for migratory waterbirds, Federally listed species, and numerous other fish and wildlife species. Federally listed interior least terns and piping plovers nest on riverine islands and sandbars and whooping cranes use the shallow channels as roosting habitat during their spring and fall migration. In addition, millions of waterfowl and nearly 80% of the world's sandhill crane population migrate to the central Platte River and rely on the river and its associated habitats as a stopover point to rest and re-fuel during their arduous journey back to the breeding grounds. NE PFW staff continued to work closely with private landowners, conservation organizations and State and Federal agencies to restore and manage these biologically important habitats for Federal trust species. Seven new agreements were initiated with private landowners in 2015 resulting in the restoration of 388 acres of wetland; 0.71 miles of riverine/riparian habitat; and 4.76 miles of riverine sloughs and backwaters.

Central Platte River Focus Area				
Habitat Type	FY 2015 Accomplishment	2012-2015 Accomplishment (4 years)	FY 2012-2016 Goal	% 5-year Goal Completed
Wetland (Acres)	388	1,132	1,250	90.6%
Upland (Acres)	0	565	1,250	45.2%
Riverine in-channel (Miles)	0.71	6.51	10	65.1%
Riverine sloughs (Miles)	4.76	7.52	7.5	100.2%
Partners/Projects (PLAs)	7	25	25	100%

*NE PFW monarch butterfly project located along the central Platte River. This picture shows invasive trees removed from native grassland habitat located on the Bader Park Project. USFWS photo.*



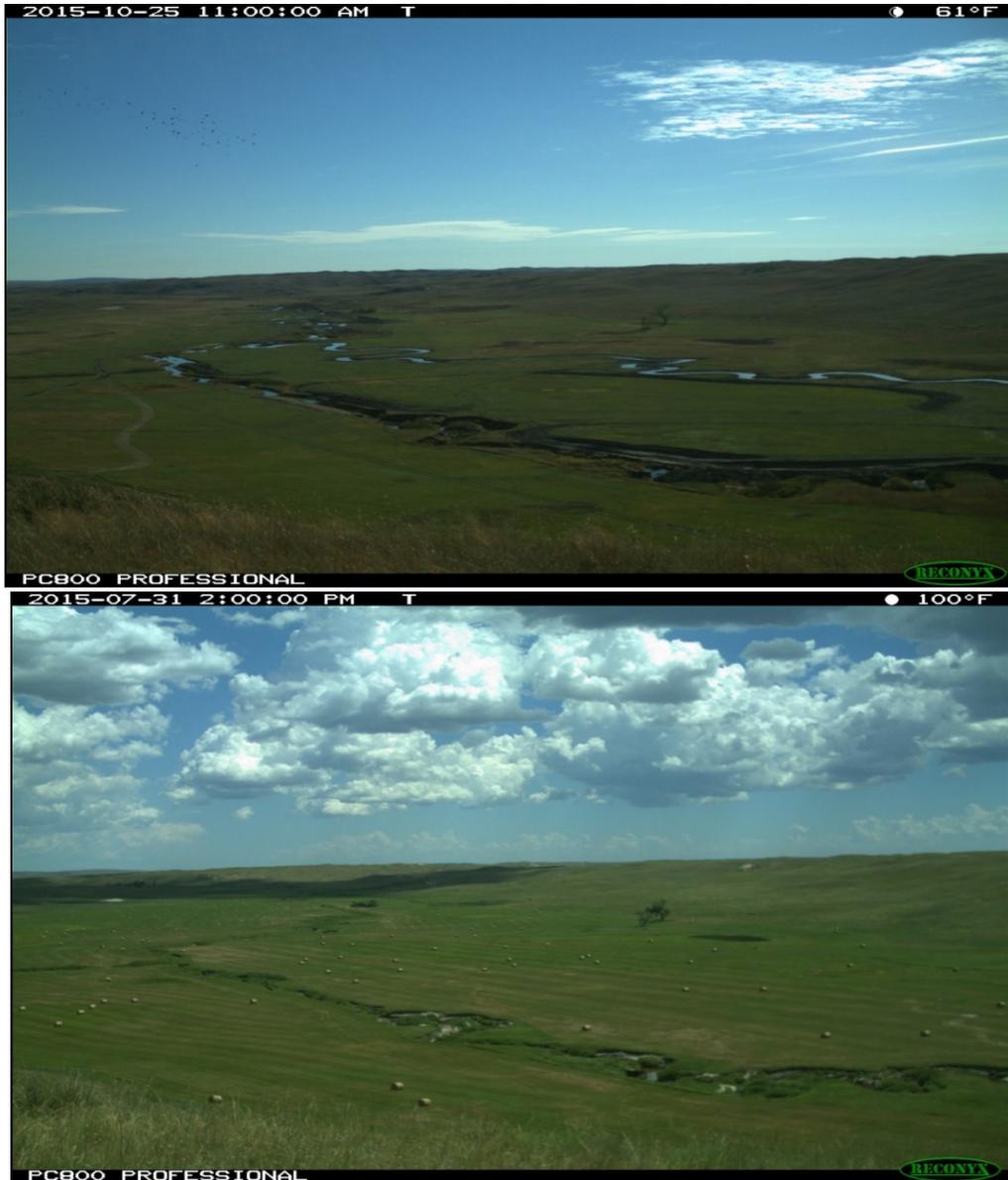
An example of a project completed along the central Platte River this past year is the Bader Park Wet Meadow/Lowland Grassland Habitat Restoration Project (shown above). In 2015, the NE PFW worked with the landowner (Bader Park) and Prairie Plains Resource Institute (PPRI) and embarked on a restoration project on Bader Park. The overall goal of this project is to restore lowland grassland and native wet meadow habitat along the central Platte River for monarch butterflies and other pollinators, waterfowl, other migratory waterbirds, grassland nesting birds, and other native wildlife species. A PLA signed by the conservation partners provided the funding and framework to remove invasive trees (e.g., Russian olive and cedar trees) and other undesirable invasive vegetation from approximately 100 acres of lowland grassland and wet meadow habitat and a ½ mile of riparian habitat. The successful restoration and management of Bader Park will provide important wet meadow and native grassland habitat for numerous species of native pollinators including the monarch butterfly. Funding for this project was provided by the landowner, NE PFW, and the Services Monarch Initiative.

### Sandhills Focus Area

The Sandhills region is an intact rolling prairie landscape intermixed with wetlands, meadows, and streams and sustains profitable private ranching, wildlife and vegetative diversity. The uniqueness of the Sandhills landscape is well recognized and continues to motivate ranchers to partner with the NE PFW along with several NGO’s and State and Federal agencies to implement mutually acceptable projects that benefit ranching, wildlife and vegetative diversity, and associated water resources. In FY 2015 ten new agreements were initiated, resulting in the restoration/enhancement of 413 acres of grassland habitat, 1,362 acres of wet meadow/lowland grassland habitat, and 1.4 miles of stream/riparian habitat.

<b>Sandhills Focus Area</b>				
<b>Habitat Type</b>	<b>FY 2015 Accomplishment</b>	<b>2012-2015 Accomplishment (4 years)</b>	<b>FY 2012-2016 Goal</b>	<b>% 5-year Goal Completed</b>
<b>Wetland (Acres)</b>	1,362	2,813	5,000	56.3%
<b>Upland (Acres)</b>	413	8,521	50,000	17%
<b>Riverine/Stream (Miles)</b>	1.4	14.58	25	58.3%
<b>Riverine Slough (Miles)</b>	N/A	0.58	N/A	N/A
<b>Partners/Projects (#PLAs)</b>	10	23	40	57.5%

The Sandhills landscape lends itself to solving resource concerns with innovation and resilient partnerships. During 2015, NE PFW staff continued to work with existing partnerships as well as pursuing new partnerships with landowners, NGO’s, and State and County governments. An example of a project completed in the Sandhills this past year is the Gordon Creek Stream Restoration Project located in Cherry County. The purpose of this project was to restore the natural hydrology to approximately 3 miles of perennial flowing stream channel and approximately 422 acres of adjacent wetland and wet meadow habitat. The project involved filling portions of the incised, existing ditched channel and re-directing portions of the stream into old abandoned remnant channels located throughout the floodplain



*NE PFW Gordon Creek Stream Restoration Project located in the Sandhills Focus Area. Top photo is a before picture (July 31, 2015). Bottom photo is during construction (October 25, 2015). Bottom pictures shows restored meanders and ditched channel being filled. Time lapse photography. USFWS photo.*

The hydrological restoration associated with the Gordon Creek project included reconnecting the stream to the historic floodplain, thereby restoring water table levels throughout the floodplain, providing aquatic passage, and increasing the quality and quantity of wetland and stream habitat for federal trust species. This project was completed via a partnership effort between the landowner, Sandhills Task Force, NGPC, NRCS, and the NE PFW program.

**North Platte River Focus Area**

The North Platte River in western Nebraska is a biologically important area for Federal trust species and also an area with intense pressures and continued habitat degradation. Landowner interest in restoration activities is high. Eight new agreements were initiated in 2015 with 1,540 acres of wetland and lowland grassland, 1.95 miles of riverine/riparian habitat, and 2.0 miles of wetland sloughs and backwater habitat restored.

<b>North Platte River Focus Area</b>				
<b>Habitat Type</b>	<b>FY 2015 Accomplishment</b>	<b>2012-2015 Accomplishment (4 years)</b>	<b>FY2012-2016 Goal</b>	<b>% 5-year Goal Completed</b>
<b>Wetland (Acres)</b>	1,075	3,504	2,000	175.2%
<b>Upland (Acres)</b>	465	558	1,000	55.8%
<b>Riverine in-channel (Miles)</b>	1.95	12.57	15	83.8%
<b>Riverine Slough (Miles)</b>	2.0	10.27	10	102.7%
<b>Partners/Projects (#PLAs)</b>	8	28	35	80%

An example of a habitat restoration project completed in this focus area during FY 2015 is the Meisner Slough Restoration project pictured below. The overall goal of this project is to restore riverine floodplain and lowland grassland habitat along the North Platte River for waterfowl, sandhill cranes, other migratory waterbirds, river otters, and other native fish and wildlife species. This project is the second phase of a multiple phased effort to restore several habitat components of the property. Approximately 2,605 linear feet of riverine wetland slough and backwater habitat and approximately 118 acres of lowland grassland/wetland habitat have been restored by: (a) excavating sediment from historic wetland features, (b) removing barriers and providing aquatic passage, (c) seeding the area to a moderately diverse mixture of native grasses and forbs, and (d) maintaining the entire site through the use of prescribed management. Partners include the landowner, Platte River Basin Environments, NGPC, and the NE PFW.



*NE PFW wetland slough restoration project located within the North Platte River Focus Area. Photo was taken after the riverine slough was restored. USFWS photo.*

## Central Loess Hills and Loup River System Focus Area

The Central Loess Hills and Loup River Focus Area consists primarily of meandering sand bottom river systems, large wet meadow complexes, playa wetlands and mixed grass prairie including areas of tall, short, and sand prairie plant species. The area is biologically significant for waterfowl, shorebirds, grassland nesting birds, Federally listed species, (e.g. whooping crane, interior least tern, piping plover, western prairie-fringed orchid, American burying beetle) native prairie fishes and contains large expanses of unbroken prairies. NE PFW focused its efforts on removing invasive species and restoring and managing native plant communities. One new agreement was initiated in 2015 leading to the restoration of 10 acres of native grassland habitat.

Central Loess Hills and Loup River System Focus Area				
Habitat Type	FY 2015 Accomplishment	2012-2015 Accomplishment (4 years)	FY 2012-2016 Goal	% 5-year Goal Completed
Wetland (Acres)	10	377	750	50.3%
Upland (Acres)	0	1,098	5,000	22%
Riverine in-channel (Miles)	0.25	3.38	5	67.6%
Riverine Slough (Miles)	0	0	5	0%
Partners/Projects (#PLAs)	1	7	25	28%



*NE PFW FY 2015 North Loup River Habitat Restoration Project showing ongoing invasive tree removal via mechanical means. USFWS photo.*

The North Loup River Habitat Restoration Project (shown above) is located in Garfield County, Nebraska and is an example of continuing efforts to restore riverine floodplain habitat within this focus area. Restoration activities included removing invasive trees (Russian olive and eastern red cedar) from riverine floodplain habitat. The landowner agrees to utilize prescribed management to maintain the site. Partners include the landowner and the NE PFW.

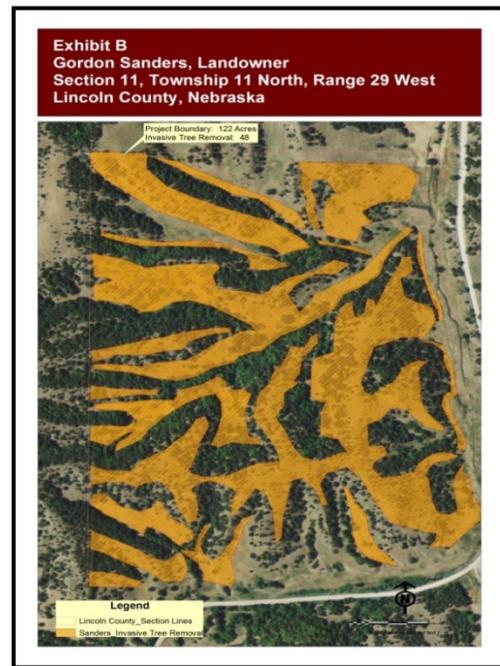
## Loess Canyons Focus Area

The Loess Canyons are a unique landscape of mixed grass prairie intersected with cropland, steep canyons, wetlands, and numerous stream courses and drainages. The area is significant in that it contains one of the largest known populations of the Federally and State endangered American burying beetle as well as significant breeding populations of numerous grassland nesting birds. The landscape is threatened by a rapid expansion of invasive trees. It has been estimated that over two percent of the prairies are being overtaken by invasive trees annually. Not only does the rapid expansion of invasive trees threaten native plant and animal species, but it threatens the livestock production way of life in the area. There is high private landowner interest in both mechanical tree removal and prescribed burning to restore lands back to open prairie and maintain them in a prairie state. Ten new landowner agreements were signed in 2015 leading to restoration on 5,668 acres of Loess Canyon prairie.

Loess Canyon Focus Area				
Habitat Type	FY 2015 Accomplishment	2012-2015 Accomplishment (4 years)	FY 2012-2016 Goal	% 5-year Goal Completed
Upland (Acres)	5,668	22,285	10,000	223%
Partners/Projects (#PLAs)	10	36	25	144%

The Sanders Loess Canyon Prairie Habitat Restoration Project is located in Lincoln County in the Loess Canyon Region of south-central Nebraska and was completed in FY 2015. The purpose of this project is to restore and manage 122 acres of Loess Canyon mixed grass prairie habitat for the benefit of American burying beetles, grassland nesting birds and other wildlife. This was accomplished by mechanically removing invasive woody species (e.g., eastern red cedar) from portions of the project area and maintaining the entire site through the use of prescribed management (e.g., deferred grazing, prescribed burning). The project enhanced the native qualities of the grassland, increase plant diversity, and suppress the invasion of cedar trees and smooth and downy brome grass.

This project will benefit a full complement of grassland dependent wildlife species including the following at-risk species: American burying beetle, greater prairie chicken, short-eared owls, upland sandpiper, dickcissel, grasshopper sparrow, as well as numerous other species of native flora and fauna associated with the mixed grass prairie. Funding partners include the landowner, Pheasants Forever, NGPC, and the NE PFW.



## Eastern Tallgrass Prairie Focus Area

The Eastern Tallgrass Prairie focus area includes the Sandstone and Southeast Prairies, and the native prairies located throughout the Verdigre-Bazile Creek Watershed. NE PFW staff worked with the NGPC and Northern Prairie Land Trust to remove and control invasive species and to restore and improve native grassland conditions. Numerous species of at-risk grassland wildlife including: grassland nesting birds (e.g., greater prairie-chicken, Henslow’s sparrow, bobolink), reptiles (e.g., milk snake, eastern and western hognose snake), insects (e.g., regal fritillary butterfly), mammals (e.g., plains pocket mouse) and numerous other species benefit from the completion of projects throughout this focus area. Six new agreements were initiated in 2015 including one project located in the Sandstone prairie, two projects located along the Lower Niobrara River, and 3 projects located within the Verdigre-Bazile Creek Watershed prairies. The six projects involved removing invasive eastern red cedars and other undesirable woody species (e.g., Siberian elm, Russian olive, locust, Osage orange) from grassland and Oak Woodlands resulting in the restoration and enhancement of 3,079 acres of native grassland/woodland habitat.

<b>Eastern Tallgrass Prairie Focus Area</b>				
<b>Habitat Type</b>	<b>FY 2015 Accomplishment</b>	<b>2012-2015 Accomplishment (4 years)</b>	<b>FY 2012-2016 Goal</b>	<b>% 5-year Goal Completed</b>
<b>Wetland (Acres)</b>	0	0	500	0%
<b>Upland (Acres)</b>	3,079	6,992	12,500	55.9%
<b>Partners/Projects (#PLAs)</b>	6	27	35	77.1%

Additional Projects: During FY 2015, the NE PFW program entered into five new agreements with private landowners located in areas outside of identified focus areas. The projects benefitted Federal trust species and were located within the Platte River, Snake River, and Ponca Bluffs Biologically Unique Landscape and resulted in the restoration and enhancement of 1,229 acres of native grassland, wetland, and woodland habitat and approximately 5.36 miles of stream/riparian habitat.

## Goal II. Broaden and Strengthen Partnerships

This past year, NE PFW staff sought out opportunities to build new partnerships with private landowners and other groups, agencies, and organizations. NE PFW staff work collaboratively with its partners and develop 60 new partnership agreements with landowners to accomplish mutually beneficial projects that contributed towards habitat and technical assistance targets identified in the PFW 2012-2016 Strategic Plan.

Twelve formal partnership agreements are also in place with conservation groups and other private organizations to restore and enhance fish and wildlife habitat in priority landscapes throughout Nebraska. The NE PFW program has formal partnership agreements with the following conservation partners: Ducks Unlimited, Sandhills Task Force, The Crane Trust, Northern Prairie Land Trust, Audubon’s Rowe Sanctuary, Platte River Basin Environments,

Nebraska Community Foundation, Quail/Pheasants Forever, Nebraska Land Trust, Prairie Plains Resource Institute, and The Nature Conservancy.

Numerous informal partnerships are also in place and critical to the successful implementation of the NE PFW program. The NGPC and NRCS are major partners in the conservation of habitat on private lands throughout Nebraska and NE PFW staff coordinated with the NGPC and NRCS to deliver habitat restoration projects on private lands in high priority landscapes. Below are a few additional examples of efforts this past year to broaden and strengthen partnerships:

Landscape Level Initiatives: NE PFW staff took an active role in the following larger landscape level initiatives: RWBJV, Sandhills Task Force, Nebraska Natural Legacy Project, Tallgrass Prairie Partnership, Platte River Basin Environments Partnership, Shortgrass Prairie Partnership, Central Loess Hills Initiative, Loess Canyons Initiative, Verdigre-Brazile Watershed Initiative, Central Platte River Habitat Partnership, Platte Valley Weed Management Partnership, Pine Ridge BUL Initiative, and the Gordon Creek Restoration Initiative.

Funding Initiatives: NE PFW staff coordinated with our partners to successfully secure funding from numerous sources to design, plan and implement habitat restoration projects for Federal trust species throughout NE PFW conservation focus areas this past year. Cost of the projects funded in part through the NE PFW program in FY 2015 totaled approximately \$2.1 million. Approximately 12% (\$261,000) of the total restoration cost was provided from NE PFW 1121 habitat restoration funds. Approximately 8% (\$159,367) of the total restoration cost was provided from Service CRI funds. The other 80% (~\$1.68 million) was leveraged from other non-program funding sources, (Partner Cash Contributions = ~\$1.38 million; Partner In-kind Contributions = ~\$304,000). Partnerships such as those listed above are vital to the successful implementation of the PFW program throughout Nebraska.

### **Goal III. Improve Information Sharing and Communication**

NE PFW staff made increasing awareness of the PFW program and the Service's mission a priority during this past year. An overarching objective of the NE PFW program is to maintain and improve information sharing and communication with our internal and external partners. NE PFW staff actively participated in numerous workshops, seminars, conferences, meetings, field tours, landowner/watershed meetings, and field trips. NE PFW staff also gave presentations to local, state, and Federal agencies and organizations to inform the public of the importance of conserving species and habitat on private lands. The items listed below are few examples of some of the activities completed by NE PFW staff this past year that contributed significantly toward statewide targets for improving information sharing and communication:

8th Annual Private Lands Partners Day and Field Tour: In September 2015, Private Lands Partners Day was held in the Nebraska Sandhills. It was hosted by the PFW program, Sandhills Task Force and Partners for Conservation and it was sponsored by many conservation organizations. It was a national gathering of private landowners and conservation partners from government agencies and nonprofit organizations designed to promote landscape level, voluntary collaborations to ensure that working landscapes continue to provide for both people and nature. Nearly 200 people were in attendance representing 30 states; a record attendance level. Roughly

half of the attendees were landowners or managers and half were conservationists. Dan Ashe, Director of the Service, along with several Regional Directors and Headquarters staff attended the event. Also in attendance was Nebraska Lieutenant Governor, Mike Foley; NGPC Director, Jim Douglas; and Nebraska NRCS State Conservationist, Craig Derickson. Participants gained knowledge about the Sandhills during a tour where speakers shared information about Sandhills hydrology/geology, eastern red cedar invasion, grazing plans/ranch management, conservation easements, conservation partnerships, stream/wetland restorations, lake renovations, and more. The following day, participants listened to presentations given by landowners from Nebraska and many other states including Alabama, Arizona, South Dakota, Montana, and Colorado. Each story talked about conservation and the benefits of using a partnership approach in their different landscapes.



*Private Lands Partners Day conference hosted by the PFW program, Sandhills Task Force, and Partners for Conservation held in North Platte, NE in September 2015. USFWS photo.*

Central Nebraska Educational Programs: During this past year, NE PFW staff participated in numerous outdoor educational workshops and events. For example, the NE PFW staff organized and led educational programs at Museum of Natural Arts (MONA) Crane Workshops this past year. Nearly 200 elementary and middle school students from 8 local schools participated and learned about the migration journey of sandhill cranes from their wintering grounds to the nesting grounds. The programs involved tracking crane migration and discussing species behavior and habitat needs. Some of the programs also focused on insect adaptations, ecology, and diversity. In exchange for conducting the crane program, MONA donates wildlife books to area schools. This year's donation of \$250 went towards purchasing wildlife-related library books for a local school.

High School Education Programs: NE PFW staff provide both in-school and out-of-school youth education programs periodically throughout the year. One example of a 2015 education program includes speaking to the high school Fish and Wildlife Management Class at Brady Public Schools. Local PFW staff provided interactive information about fish and wildlife careers, the

PPF program, habitat restoration techniques and activities, and about new and on-going wildlife management research occurring in their local area. Seventeen students participated in the activity.

Sandhills Ranch Employee Training: In June 2015, NE PFW and STF staff organized and hosted a field training sessions for ranch employees. The training was a one day event designed to teach land managers about range management and grazing. Each manager was provided a plant identification book as well as other material. The participants were evaluated after the training and all managers said they would implement changes based upon information that they learned. The managers collectively make decisions on 160,000 acres. We hope to repeat this training every year.



*NE PFW and Sandhills Task Force staff organized and hosted a field training sessions for ranch employees in June of 2015. Photo by S. Kelly, STF.*

Cooperative Recovery Initiative Program: The NE PFW program, in partnership with the RWB-WMD, Migratory Birds Program, Ecological Services, and NGPC, continued to coordinate watershed restoration throughout the western RWBs using grant monies received as part of the CRI. This project is designed to restore wetland hydrology to high priority wetlands located throughout the western RWB for whooping cranes and other migratory waterbirds.

Platte River Ecology Presentation and Habitat Restoration Tour for the University of Missouri's Natural Resources Graduate Program: On October 22, 2015, the NE PFW program, NGPC, and TNC organized and hosted an event along the central Platte River for graduate students and staff from the University of Missouri's School of Natural Resources. This event began with a presentation given by NE PFW program staff on the history, ecology and importance of the Platte River to migratory birds and threatened and endangered species. A field tour followed that showcased habitat restoration and management activities ranging from wetland restoration, invasive tree removal, phragmites control, prescribed burning, vegetation control, and stream channel habitat restoration.

## Goal IV. Enhance Our Workforce

The NE PFW workforce consist of five full-time private lands biologists for most of the year. For the last quarter (July – September) of FY 2015 the Sandhills PFW position was vacant. NE PFW staff performed at an exceptional level during 2015 and contributed significantly towards meeting NE PFW habitat and partnership related targets as identified in the PFW 2012-2016 Strategic Plan.

To maintain a high level of professionalism and to better accomplish the Service’s goal of conserving fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats, NE PFW staff participated in numerous training opportunities (e.g., formal training, workshops, seminars, conferences) during FY 2015.

For example, the NE PFW staff took the initiative to further develop their skills by participating in the following training opportunities: Principals of Modeling Course; Conservation Science and Restoration Series Webinars; Basic Financial Assistance Training; Nebraska Natural Legacy Conferences and Tours; TWS State and Regional Conferences; Private Lands Partners Day Conferences and Tour; NGPC Partners Section Meetings; Prescribed Burn Workshops; Nebraska Weed Management Association Conference; Climate Change Conference; RWBJV Informational Seminar; Tallgrass Prairie Seminar; NCTC Wildland Hydrology/Stream Restoration Workshop; NRCS, DU, and NGPC Field Days and Tours; and Prescribed Fire and Wildland Fire training. In addition, the NE PFW Sandhills Field Biologist participating in a 30-day detail at the Anchorage Fish and Wildlife Field Office. While there, he worked for the combined National Fish Passage Program, Coastal Program, and PFW program..



*Wildlife biologists participating in the Wetland Restoration Project Tour along the North Platte River. USFWS photo.*

NE PFW staff also participated in: (a) Managing Generational Diversity training, (b) Women in Business: One Simple Skill to Curb unconscious Gender Bias webinar, (c) Regional Office Book

Club and other webinars and discussions to further enhance their leadership skills and abilities to work with a multi-generational group of partners and the general public.

NE PFW staff also successfully completed all safety requirements/training including CPR and First Aid Training, Job Hazard Assessments, Risk Assessments, and updated their SAF01 during this past year. NE PFW staff also participated on numerous Project Leader and PFW staff conference calls and stayed current on Division of Refuges and PFW policies and updates.

The training and activities that the NE PFW staff completed this past year have contributed towards their ability to successfully lead and delivery the PFW program throughout Nebraska. Efforts to successfully meet 2012-2016 five year goals throughout Nebraska's conservation focus area are largely dependent on the programs ability to maintain a highly effective workforce and to provide both financial (dirtwork funds) and technical support (staffing) to partners throughout identified conservation focus areas.

## **Goal V. Increase Accountability**

During FY 2015, the NE PFW Coordinator collaborated funding with the Nebraska Field Office's Administrative Officer, Refuge Project Leaders and Service staff and distributed TA and HR funding for personnel and habitat restoration projects. NE PFW 1121 funds were managed in an effective and timely manner. All 1121 funds were obligated by established deadlines. All appropriate procedures/guidelines were followed and necessary paperwork was completed for projects. The NE PFW Coordinator served as Project Officer and fiduciary for Service funds for grants and other funding agreements and worked closely with the Nebraska Field Office's Administrative Officer and the R6 PFW Grants Officer. All 2015 PLAs (60) were reviewed by the NE PFW State Coordinator to ensure quality control and to manage for program excellence.

All 2015 private lands projects, including spatial data, were reviewed, tracked, and entered into the HabITS database by established deadlines. NE PFW staff provided the State Coordinator with accurate information regarding accomplishments throughout their areas of responsibility for inclusion into HabITS. The NE PFW Coordinator coordinated with the PFW Deputy Regional Coordinator to ensure HabITS data were entered correctly and accurately.

To ensure NE PFW efforts accomplished the greatest biological benefit per conservation dollar expanded, the program used decision support tools, predictive models, and the experience and knowledge of our local landowners and partners to assist in the strategic delivery of the PFW program throughout Nebraska. NE PFW personnel continue to use GIS coverage, habitat models, and decision support tools provided by the RWBJV GIS Team to help guide delivery of conservation practices to benefit bird species of conservation concern. NE PFW field biologists were equipped with digital cameras to increase the number of before, during, and after construction photos for projects and to facilitate the development of restoration plans and accurate cost estimates.

Below are few specific examples of ongoing efforts to monitor and develop tools to assist the NE PFW staff in the strategic implementation of the NE PFW program:

Sandhill Cranes and Waterfowl of the North Platte River Valley: Evaluation of Habitat Selection to Guide Conservation Delivery: With NE PFW staff and multiple conservation partners actively implementing conservation projects throughout the North Platte River focus area, the need to develop a decision support system to more effectively and efficiently deliver conservation actions at the correct geography and scale is needed. NE PFW staff continued to coordinate aerial surveys this past year to document the distribution and abundance of roosting cranes and waterfowl in the North Platte River Valley. Year 1 and 2 aerial surveys were completed in February, March, and April, 2014 and 2015. The data will be incorporated into species distribution models and a decision support system to prioritize conservation actions for cranes and waterfowl. This is a partnership effort between NE PFW program, DU, and the NGPC with funding support from the Great Plains LCC.

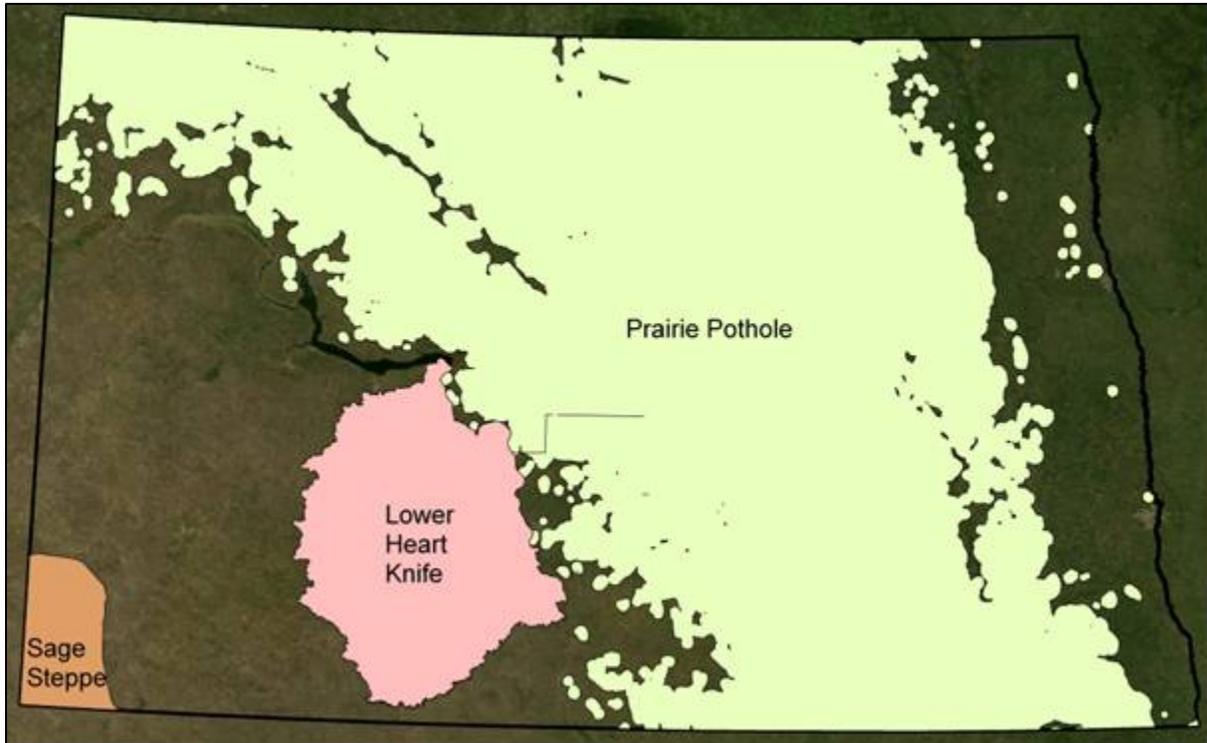
Gordon Creek Time Lapse Photography and Monitoring Efforts: This past July, NE PFW staff in coordination with staff from the NGPC and a local Sandhills Ranch set up time lapse cameras along a PFW stream restoration project located along Gordon Creek. The purpose of the time lapse cameras are to assist with long-term monitoring efforts and to photo document the changes that occur throughout the valley as a result of the restoration project. Cameras have been deployed to document conditions before restoration begins and will be deployed for the next three to five years. In addition, temperature loggers were deployed along the stream channel to monitor changes in water temperature.



Rainwater Basin Surveys and Monitoring: To monitor the effectiveness of restoration efforts in the western RWB, the following monitoring activities are currently ongoing: (a) collecting spring aerial photography to complete annual habitat survey; (b) installing piezometers/level loggers to record water level at a subset of wetlands that receive (9 sites) and do not receive (9 sites) watershed restorations; (c) conducting whooping crane surveys throughout the whooping crane spring and fall migration seasons; and (d) assessing abiotic wetland quality factors. Data collected from these efforts are being used to document and quantify the impacts of restoration activities on wetland hydroperiod and allow for more robust statistical models to be developed to describe habitat selection by whooping cranes.

## North Dakota Overview

Since 1987, the ND PFW program has touched the lives of more than 3,000 farmers, ranchers and landowners along with their families. We feel fortunate to have the opportunity each day to work closely with so many wonderful cooperators, partner agencies and organizations. Together we are benefitting the agricultural community and helping dreams come true for conservation-minded landowners, all while positively impacting Federal trust species. Everything we do within the program is dependent on our cooperators and they continue to be the key to our success.



*North Dakota PFW program Focus Areas. USFWS Map.*

Scott McLeod  
North Dakota Partners for Fish and Wildlife State Coordinator  
USFWS, Bismarck Private Lands Office  
3425 Miriam Ave.  
Bismarck, ND 58501

During FY2015, the ND PFW program partnered with 82 private landowners and other cooperators restoring, creating and enhancing over 11,343 acres of wildlife habitat on private land. FY2015 marked the fourth year of the 5-year Strategic Plan and the program again made steady progress toward our strategic goals. We continue to strengthen long-term partnerships, strive to develop new partnerships, adapt to program challenges and strengthen our programmatic accountability, all with an eye to the future. There are certainly ongoing challenges for natural resource work in North Dakota, but the program stands poised to meet those challenges head on.

## Prairie Pothole Region Focus Area

The Prairie Pothole Region focus area covers over 50% of North Dakota at just over 25,000,000 acres. The Prairie Pothole Region is legendary for its continental importance to waterfowl and other migratory birds. This focus area boasts the “best of the best” in terms of wetland densities in the United States. The area is characterized by vast prairie and wetland complexes with wetland densities in some areas reaching 150 basins per square mile. These areas of high wetland densities have the ability to support more than 100 duck pairs per square mile. The Prairie Pothole Region is also currently a priority area for USFWS Realty acquisitions as well as for Ducks Unlimited, one of our major conservation partners. Not surprisingly, the Prairie Pothole Region focus area encompasses a large portion of the Prairie Pothole Joint Venture.

**Since the Program’s inception in 1987, ND PFW Biologists have restored the hydrology on over 9,500 acres of prairie pothole wetlands in North Dakota, the majority of which remain intact today.**

### Conserve Habitat

ND PFW continued to make progress toward our 5-year acreage goals for all habitat types in FY2015 as weather conditions were favorable and made completion of many types of projects within this focus area possible. Within the Prairie Pothole Region focus area, ND PFW made significant strides toward meeting all of our habitat goals in FY2015 and we are on pace to reach our overall acreage goal as identified in our 5-year strategic plan. ND PFW continues to work closely with the realty program to restore and perpetually protect wetland and grassland habitat. One statistic that we are particularly proud of is that 88% of the wetland basins restored during FY2015 were protected under a USFWS wetland easement, assuring they remain intact in perpetuity.

<b>ND PRAIRIE POTHOLE REGION FOCUS AREA</b>				
<b>Habitat Type</b>	<b>FY2015 Accomplishments</b>	<b>2012-2015 Accomplishments</b>	<b>FY2012-2016 Goal</b>	<b>% 5-yr. Goal Completed</b>
Wetland Restoration	317.3	769.9	1,000	77%
Grassland Restoration	2,529.9	5,545.4	8,000	69%
Wetland Establishment	26.3	70.0	200	35%
Grazing Systems	6,567.8	22,039.7	25,000	88%
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>9,441.3</b>	<b>28,425.0</b>	<b>34,200</b>	<b>83%</b>

## Broaden and Strengthen Partnerships



ND PFW Biologists continued to forge new partnerships in FY2015 and cooperated on projects with 37 new landowner cooperators in this focus area. The ND PFW staff also provides a significant amount of technical assistance, through close coordination with USDA, the North Dakota Game and Fish Department, and various NGO's, to promote and assist landowners with Farm Bill Conservation

programs. Additionally, we are always working to forge new partnerships with a variety of conservation agencies and organizations, such as the North Dakota Grazing Lands Coalition.

<b>ND PRAIRIE POTHOLE REGION FOCUS AREA – FY2015 PARTNERSHIPS</b>			
<b>Project Type</b>	<b>FY2015 Accomplishments</b>	<b>FY2012-2016 Goal</b>	<b>% 5-yr. Goal Completed</b>
New Landowner Cooperators	37	200	80%
Technical Assistance Days	75	200	221%

Cost-share rates on NDPFW projects continue to vary substantially from year to year. Leveraging rates identified in our Strategic Plan are generally based on the cost-share rates attained during the previous 5-year period. In FY2015, for every dollar of 1121 program funds expended on the ground, we leveraged nearly \$8 in other Federal funds or partner funds from NGO's, state agencies and private landowners.

<b>ND PRAIRIE POTHOLE REGION FOCUS AREA – FY2015 COST-SHARE</b>			
<b>Funding Type</b>	<b>FY2015 Funds Expended</b>	<b>FY2012-2016 Goal</b>	<b>5-yr. Average</b>
FWS Funds	22%	25%	31%
NAWCA Grant Funds	19%	35%	23%
Landowner Cash/In-kind	28%	20%	32%
Other Partner Contributions	31%	20%	14%

## Biological Outcomes

ND PFW continues to work closely with the Region 6 HAPET office to quantify biological outcomes for five key upland nesting duck species (mallards, blue-winged teal, gadwall, Northern pintail and Northern shoveler). Specifically, ND PFW staff collaborated with HAPET staff to assess breeding pair and recruitment benefits associated with new Landowner Agreements. HAPET estimates that both 10-year and perpetual ND PFW projects completed during the next five years will result in 64,476 new breeding pairs and 230,470 new recruits gracing our flyways.



<b>ND PRAIRIE POTHOLE REGION FOCUS AREA – BIOLOGICAL OUTCOMES</b>				
<b>Accomplishment Type</b>	<b>FY2015 Accomplishments</b>	<b>FY2012-2015 Accomplishments</b>	<b>FY2012-2016 Goal</b>	<b>% 5-yr. Goal Completed</b>
Cumulative # of Breeding Pairs Benefitted	22,001	50,272	64,476	78%
Cumulative # of Recruits Benefitted	62,853	166,723	230,470	72%
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>84,854</b>	<b>216,995</b>	<b>294,946</b>	<b>74%</b>

## Lower Heart/Knife River Focus Area

The Lower Heart/Knife River focus area is approximately 3.5 million acres in size, or 8% of the land area of North Dakota. This focus area is arid to semi-arid, mostly non-glaciated and is characterized by transitional zones of mixed cropland and grassland that are threatened by cropland conversion. Once common, native grasslands are seriously threatened and many bird species are declining. Relatively few natural wetlands exist on the landscape so water can be a limiting factor for landowners interested in continuing with grassland agriculture. A priority for the ND PFW is helping ensure ranchers continue ranching. Oftentimes, helping a rancher develop additional water sources is a critical step toward helping them improve grassland management as well as ensuring that the grass stays “green-side” up. The Lower Heart/Knife River focus area is also an important part of the landscape that makes up the Northern Great Plains Joint Venture.

## Conserve Habitat

ND PFW Biologists made significant progress toward our wetland establishment, grassland establishment and riparian restoration 5-year acreage goals in FY2015. In particular, we made great strides toward our grassland enhancement goal, getting nearly 60% of the 5 year target in one year. Additionally, we have already exceeded our 5-year goals in grassland establishment and riparian restoration.

<b>LOWER HEART/KNIFE RIVER FOCUS AREA</b>				
<b>Project Type</b>	<b>FY2015 Accomplishments</b>	<b>FY2012-2015 Accomplishments</b>	<b>FY2012-2016 Goal</b>	<b>% 5-yr. Goal Completed</b>
Wetland Establishment	36.8	273.6	400	68%
Grassland Establishment	200.5	530.7	400	133%
Grassland Enhancement	1,661.9	1,806.0	3,000	60%
Riparian Restoration (mi.)	2.7	4.9	3	163%
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>1,901.9</b>	<b>2,615.2</b>	<b>3,803</b>	<b>69%</b>

## Broaden and Strengthen Partnerships



ND PFW Biologists worked with seven new landowners in this focus area in FY2015. Our 5-year target of 150 new landowners is a daunting task, especially in a relatively unpopulated area, so we definitely have a challenge ahead of us. ND PFW Biologists are, however, on track to exceed the established goals for Technical Assistance.

<b>LOWER HEART/KNIFE RIVER FOCUS AREA – FY2015 PARTNERSHIPS</b>			
<b>Project Type</b>	<b>FY2015 Accomplishments</b>	<b>FY2012-2016 Goal</b>	<b>% 5-yr. Goal Completed</b>
New Landowner Cooperators	7	150	21%
Technical Assistance Days	25	150	83%

As the cost of doing projects continues to rise faster than our budgets, it is more important than ever to broaden and strengthen partnerships. In FY2015, for every dollar of 1121 program funds expended on the ground in this focus area, we leveraged over \$5 in other Federal funds or partner funds from NGO's, state agencies and private landowners.

<b>LOWER HEART/KNIFE RIVER FOCUS AREA – FY2015 COST-SHARE</b>			
<b>Funding Type</b>	<b>FY2015 Funds Expended</b>	<b>FY2012-2016 Goal</b>	<b>5-yr. Average</b>
FWS Funds	20%	25%	26%
NAWCA Grant Funds	39%	60%	43%
Landowner Cash/In-kind	17%	12%	8%
Other Partner Contributions	24%	3%	23%

### **Sage-Steppe Focus Area**

The Sage-Steppe focus area encompasses over 705,000 acres, or 1.5% of the North Dakota land base. This focus area is characterized by transitional zones of short-grass prairie intermixed with sagebrush in the extreme southwest corner of the state. While over one-quarter of the area is in public ownership, the remaining 72% is privately owned and is primarily used for livestock production. Threats to this ecosystem include invasive species, unsustainable grazing systems and conversion of grasslands to cropland.

Assisting landowners in maintaining their lands by promoting healthy rangelands is a priority for the ND PFW. Traditional ND PFW project types (grassland restoration and enhancement) are supplemented with sage-grouse specific projects such as planting cropland to native grass/sagebrush mixes, removal of fencing and tagging fences with markers to avoid collisions near leks. This focus area provides an opportunity for the program to strengthen its conservation commitment with other organizations and state agencies committed to managing greater sage grouse and other migratory birds of concern.



*Greater sage-grouse. USFWS photo.*

## Conserve Habitat

During FY2015, the ND PFW program surpassed our 5-year goal for upland restoration. In FY2015, however, we did not complete any additional projects within this focus area. One reason that projects are difficult to find within this focus area is the abundance of other programs that offer financial assistance to benefit sage grouse. While our PFW biologist in this area continues to develop relationships with landowners and other conservation professionals, it is highly unlikely that the ND PFW program will meet our 5-year objective for upland enhancements within this area.

<b>SAGE-STEPPE FOCUS AREA</b>				
<b>Project Type</b>	<b>FY2015 Accomplishments</b>	<b>FY2012-2015 Accomplishments</b>	<b>FY2012-2016 Goal</b>	<b>% 5-yr. Goal Completed</b>
Upland Restoration	0	344.7	200	172%
Upland Enhancement	0	146	1,500	10%
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>310.9</b>	<b>490.7</b>	<b>1,700</b>	<b>29%</b>

## Broaden and Strengthen Partnerships

Again, with the number of other options available to landowners to meet their conservation needs, the ND PFW program didn't complete any projects in this focus area in FY2015. The low number of individual landowners within this focus area is, and will continue to remain a challenge to meeting these 5-year goals.

<b>SAGE-STEPPE FOCUS AREA – FY2015 PARTNERSHIPS</b>			
<b>Project Type</b>	<b>FY2015 Accomplishments</b>	<b>FY2012-2016 Goal</b>	<b>% 5-yr. Goal Completed</b>
New Landowner Cooperators	0	10	30%
Technical Assistance Days	0	40	62%

<b>SAGE-STEPPE FOCUS AREA – FY2015 Cost-Share</b>			
<b>Funding Type</b>	<b>FY2015 Funds Expended</b>	<b>FY2012-2016 Goal</b>	<b>5-yr. Average</b>
FWS Funds	0%	60%	27%
Landowner Cash/In-kind	0%	30%	38%
Other Partner Contributions	0%	10%	35%

## Goal III. Improve Information Sharing and Communications

Communication and outreach are integral to the success of the ND PFW program. In fact, it could be argued that communication and outreach are the true strengths of the program and the primary reason for our successes to date. The primary communication and outreach objectives

for the program are to maintain and develop strong and positive partnerships and to increase landowner interest in the program.

The ND PFW program was very successful in its outreach efforts in FY2015. Biologists completed 86 habitat projects with cooperators, entered into Landowner Agreements with 44 new cooperators and strengthened partnerships with our conservation partners. Staff participated in several field tours highlighting the habitat challenges in North Dakota and solutions to these challenges that are being implemented. Staff also continued to participate in Local Working Groups, State Technical Committees and groups such as the Northern Great Plains Working Group. We also educated Refuge staff working on easements about potential ND PFW opportunities and stepped up our efforts to raise landowner awareness and interest in the program within the local communities where we work.

#### **Goal IV. Enhance Our Workforce**

ND PFW program biologists are some of the most dedicated and highly-motivated personnel in the Service. Their positions require that they have general knowledge of many aspects of wildlife management, agriculture, contract negotiation and administration, as well as excellent skills in working with the public, particularly landowners. Recommended activities and our ability to meet them in FY2015 are described below:

- Annually assist PFW staff in planning and scheduling training opportunities. *Objective met.*
- Maintain close coordination at least biweekly among State Coordinator and Biologists. *Objectives met through weekly staff meeting conference calls.*
- Increase all-staff meetings from one to a minimum of two or three per year. *Objective met through weekly staff meeting conference calls and face to face meetings.*
- Continue sharing weekly schedules/comments among staff. *Objective met through weekly staff meeting conference calls.*
- Continue to provide high quality training and materials to ND PFW staff. *Objective met.*

#### **Increase Accountability**

ND PFW directed its efforts to geographic focus areas and prioritized projects based on the level of contribution to the conservation of Federal Trust Species. Consideration was also given to State-listed species of concern and related habitat needs as identified in the North Dakota State Wildlife Action Plan. To increase accountability, ND PFW worked toward the following goals in FY2015:

- Provide more frequent and in-depth summary updates to our major partners.
- Increase the number of return visits we make to prior cooperators to assure the projects are functioning as intended, gather anecdotal information on wildlife use, and cooperate in additional projects that will enhance our previous work.
- Increase HabITS reporting speed.
- Continue entering ND PFW projects into GIS data layers and work with HAPET to develop models showing the positive outcomes of our work.

## **Looking to the Future**

FY2016 marks the fifth and final year of our current Strategic Plan. We plan to build on our successes of FY2015 and to double our efforts in those areas where our progress is lagging. Of course, much of this depends on Federal budgets and the availability of funds, weather conditions and other factors.

We will continue to accomplish private lands work under seven active NAWCA grants and two pending submissions, all administered by ND PFW. These nine grants will provide over \$1 million in additional federal and private matching funds for habitat work on private lands in North Dakota.

We continue to emphasize grassland conservation across North Dakota and maintaining a ranching economy is the most effective way to conserve our remaining grassland habitat. We feel strongly about this philosophy and in response, continue to increase our emphasis on enhancing these remaining grassland habitats by providing financial and technical assistance for ranchers to implement rotational grazing systems. These projects serve the dual purpose of making ranching operations more sustainable and economically viable as well as improving the grassland habitat for grassland and wetland-dependent wildlife species. North Dakota has lost more than 2 million acres of CRP grasslands since 2007 and that trend will most likely continue. However, if we can buffer those losses by continuing to work with the ranching community to maintain and manage our remaining native grassland habitats, then the overall impact of grassland loss to our Federal trust species can be minimized.

The following is a great example of several FY2015 projects that highlights the importance of building trust and fostering real, sound relationships with our cooperating landowners and the successes that a program like ND PFW can have when these relationships bear fruit.

## **Project Example 1**

**Project title:** Monarch Initiative Native Grass Restorations (ND-62514-15-007, 009, 013)

**Date of project completion:** FY 2015

**Project location details:** McIntosh County

### **Narrative summary of the project:**

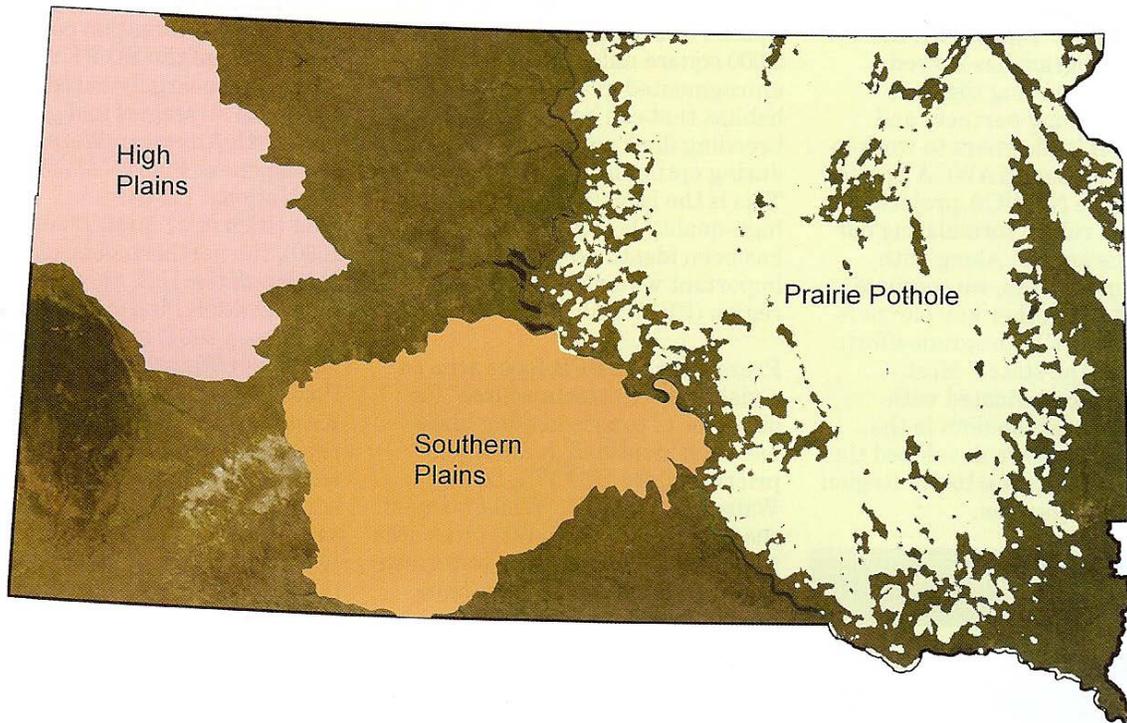
During Fiscal Year 2015, the Director of the FWS made approximately \$2 million available for monarch butterfly habitat. A portion of this funding found its way to the North Dakota Partners for Fish and Wildlife program. Using these funds, PFW Biologist, Chris Flann was able to secure three Private Landowner Agreements to restore cropland to a diverse mix of native grasses and forbs including milkweed.

This story gets even better the more you know about the project. These three agreements restored nearly 480 acres of cropland to native grassland habitat. This restored grassland also will enhance the condition of the 44.4 acres of wetlands that are within these restorations. These projects fall within North Dakota's Prairie Pothole Region Focus Area, and the 480 acres of grassland restoration will help meet the 5-year goal of 8,000 acres within this focus area. Even though these restoration projects are from three different agreements, all of the tracts of land are within the same township. To make this project even better, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has purchased grassland easements on all of these tracts of land, assuring that this habitat will remain intact in perpetuity. One additional item of note on this project is that these landowners do not spray herbicide on their lands. This will ensure that the forb component of these restoration projects will have the very best opportunity to become established and thrive, providing critically important habitat for monarchs for generations to come.

Additionally, these restoration projects were specifically designed for monarch butterflies, but they will ultimately benefit other pollinators, migratory birds and other grassland dependent wildlife. There is also the benefit to other natural resources including reduced soil erosion, improved water retention and improved soil health. Overall, these projects are a great example of the natural connection between the PFW program and the rest of the Refuge System. The pieces all came together to perpetually protect what will become a very valuable piece of restored native prairie within one of the highest priority landscapes in the world.

**Federal Trust Species:** Migratory birds, monarch butterflies

## South Dakota Overview



*South Dakota PFW program Focus Areas. USFWS Map.*

Kurt Forman  
South Dakota PFW Program State Coordinator  
PO Box 247  
Brookings, SD 57006  
605-697-2500

During FY 2015 the South Dakota (SD) PFW program signed 165 new Landowner Agreements (LAs) throughout the state. This represents \$2,070,578 of new grassland and wetland conservation projects implemented on 174 individual sites throughout South Dakota. Of the new LAs, 74% were signed in the Prairie Pothole Joint Venture (PPJV) portion of South Dakota, while the remaining 26 % were signed in the Northern Great Plains Joint Venture (NGPJV) portion of the state. As in previous years, a special emphasis was placed on implementing the Director's priority of accelerating wetland and grassland conservation in the PPJV as a result of directing additional "Duck Stamp" funds to the prairie states. Most notably, within the PPJV portion of South Dakota, 65% of the LAs signed in FY 2015 were completed in direct association with perpetual USFWS grassland and wetland conservation easements. The primary nexus between LAs and easements consisted of partnering with landowners to implement grazing systems or grassland restorations on grassland easements. Within the High Plains focus area special emphasis was placed on implementing grazing management projects with direct benefits to Greater Sage Grouse. For example, PFW staff signed a new LA for a 8,916 acre grazing management project in a key portion of South Dakota's Greater Sage Grouse range. In FY 2016 the SD PFW program will continue to strategically deliver a suite of conservation

practices focused on grassland and wetland conservation in an effort to address the loss of native prairie and associated wetlands in the PPJV portion of the state. In addition, special emphasis will be placed on restoring and enhancing pollinator habitat in the Prairie Pothole focus area, especially for monarch butterflies and Dakota skippers. Within the High Plains focus area we will continue to accelerate our grazing management work with a special emphasis on projects that directly benefit greater sage-grouse habitats. Several new long-term funding arrangements have been approved which will serve as the basis for much of the SD PFW effort in 2016. Most notably, on September 9, 2015, the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission approved a \$967,000 NAWCA grant for new grassland and wetland work throughout the PPJV portion of South Dakota. This project will be jointly delivered by Pheasants Forever and the SD PFW program. In addition, a \$200,000 grant was recently secured from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) which will be the cornerstone of our 2016 work in the High Plains and Southern Plains focus areas. This new NFW initiative will be jointly implemented by the South Dakota Grassland Coalition and the SD PFW program.

### **Goal I. Conserve Habitat**

In FY 2015, the SD PFW program continued to make progress in meeting the habitat conservation goals forwarded in the Region 6 2012-2016 PFW strategic plan. As in previous years, the vast majority of SD PFW projects were completed in association with working farms and ranches where PFW actions provide joint benefits to trust-species conservation and grassland management. Currently, six of the 10 collective habitat goals specified for the SD PFW focus areas have been met or exceeded. In the Prairie Pothole focus area nearly all of the FY 2015 accomplishments directly address the goals of the 2005 PPJV Implementation Plan and the 2005 South Dakota All Bird Conservation Plan. In FY2016 the SD PFW program will continue to coordinate very closely with Realty and Refuge staff in the PPJV portion of South Dakota to assure that new LAs and conservation easements are strategically integrated for maximum conservation results. Special emphasis will be placed on restoring and enhancing pollinator habitat in the Prairie Pothole focus area, especially for monarch butterflies and Dakota skippers. Within the Southern Plains and High Plains focus areas, PFW conservation accomplishments remain closely aligned with the goals of the NGPJV, County Conservation Districts and the South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks. More specifically, within the High Plains focus area we will continue to place a strong emphasis on implementing grazing management and riparian enhancement LAs on large contiguous tracts of native rangeland with benefits to greater Sage-grouse.

<b>Prairie Pothole Focus Area</b>				
<b>Habitat Type</b>	<b>2015 Accomplishment</b>	<b>2012-2015 Accomplishment</b>	<b>2012-2016 Goal</b>	<b>% Goal Completed</b>
<b>Grassland restoration</b>	<b>1,171 acres</b>	<b>5,096 acres</b>	<b>4,500 acres</b>	<b>113%</b>
<b>Grassland enhancement</b>	<b>21,963 acres</b>	<b>89,730 acres</b>	<b>105,000 acres</b>	<b>85%</b>
<b>Wetland restoration</b>	<b>171 acres</b>	<b>1,100 acres</b>	<b>1,100 acres</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Wetland establishment</b>	<b>54 acres</b>	<b>338 acres</b>	<b>450 acres</b>	<b>75%</b>

<b>Southern Plains Focus Area</b>				
<b>Habitat Type</b>	<b>2015 Accomplishment</b>	<b>2012-2015 Accomplishment</b>	<b>2012-2016 Goal</b>	<b>% Goal Completed</b>
Grassland restoration	74 acres	1,379 acres	600 acres	230%
Grassland enhancement	4,713 acres	35,184 acres	15,000 acres	234%
Wetland establishment	35 acres	596 acres	600 acres	99%

<b>High Plains Focus Area</b>				
<b>Habitat Type</b>	<b>2015 Accomplishment</b>	<b>2012-2015 Accomplishment</b>	<b>2012-2016 Goal</b>	<b>% Goal Completed</b>
Grassland restoration	0	0	300 acres	0
Grassland enhancement	25,517 acres	47,746 acres	10,000 acres	477%
Wetland establishment	33 acres	713 acres	300 acres	238%

## **Project Example 1**

**HabITS ID:** 743993

**Project title:** SD-64560-14-024G (Grassland Restoration)

**Date of final project completion:** FY 2015

**Project location details:** Prairie Pothole Focus Area



*Monarch butterfly utilizing a native prairie restoration with 18 species of grass and forbs on a perpetual grassland easement in the SD Prairie Pothole focus area. USFWS photo.*

### **Narrative summary of the project:**

Project # SD-645650-14-024G was completed by PFW staff working out of the Madison Wetland Management District. Specific work involved partnering with a local landowner to restore 35 acres of native grassland. SD PFW staff worked closely with the landowner and WMD staff to design the seed mix and restoration plan. Specialized grass seeding equipment was used to seed a diverse mix of 18 species of native grass and forbs including Indian grass, purple prairie clover, maximilian sunflower and prairie coneflower. Funding for the project was provided by Pheasants Forever, NAWCA and the participating landowner. The cooperating landowner was responsible for seedbed preparation and seeding. The restored grassland is enrolled in a USFWS perpetual grassland conservation easement and will serve as breeding habitat for a wide variety of ground nesting birds including northern harriers, grasshopper sparrows and northern pintails. The forb species in the seed mix also provide valuable nectar sources for a wide range pollinators, including monarch butterflies. The SD PFW program has also utilized the same NAWCA grant to sign LAs with 47 other landowners representing 1,931 acres of additional grassland restoration throughout the PPJV portion of South Dakota.

**Federal Trust Species:** Migratory birds, northern pintail, northern harrier, grasshopper sparrow

## **Project Example 2**

**HabITS ID:** 648421

**Project title:** SD-DC-12-007 (Grazing Management & Wetland Establishment)

**Date of final project completion:** FY 2015

**Project location details:** High Plains Focus Area

### **Narrative summary of the project:**

South Dakota PFW staff working out of the DC Booth National Historic Fish Hatchery partnered with a local rancher to complete a 16.7 acre wetland establishment in the SD PFW High Plains focus area. The wetland is located in a 600 acre grassland tract and serves as breeding habitat for a wide variety of birds including trumpeter swans, northern pintails and mallards. In addition to providing breeding habitat for migratory birds, the wetland also serves as a vital component of the landowner's grazing operation by providing much needed stock-water management options. Along with the wetland work, the LA is also linked to an ecologically based grazing management plan on the 600 acres of adjacent grassland. The large grassland tract size surrounding this wetland will help ensure viable recruitment rates for ground nesting birds. In combination, the wetland and grassland components of this LA personify the philosophy that working with grassland-based ranching operations on conservation matters of mutual concern is an effective bird conservation strategy. A diverse coalition of partners contributed funding and expertise to this project including the South Dakota Department of Agriculture, Ducks Unlimited, Elk Creek Conservation District, Butte Conservation District, USFWS and the South Dakota Department of Game Fish and Parks.

**Federal Trust Species:** Migratory birds, trumpeter swan, northern pintail, mallard



*Grazing management plan (600 acres) linked to a 16.7 acre wetland establishment project in the SD PFW High Plains focus area. USFWS photo.*

### **Project Example 3**

**HabITS ID:** 710093

**Project title:** SD-PI-12-011 (Grassland Restoration)

**Date of final project completion:** FY 2015

**Project location details:** Southern Plains Focus Area



*Native grassland restoration project (80 acres) completed in the SD PFW Southern Plains Focus Area. USFWS photo.*

#### **Narrative summary of the project:**

South Dakota PFW staff working out of the Pierre, SD Ecological Services office worked with a local landowner to complete a 80 acres grassland restoration. Specialized grass seeding equipment was used to seed a diverse mix of native grass and forbs including prairie sandreed, big bluestem, western wheatgrass, sideoats grama, purple prairie clover, maximilian sunflower and western yarrow. SD PFW staff worked closely with the landowner to design the seed mix and restoration plan. Funding for the grass and forb seed was provided via a cooperative agreement with the Butte Conservation District. The cooperating landowner was responsible for seedbed preparation and seeding. The grassland restoration will provide secure breeding habitat for a variety of ground nesting birds including long-billed curlews, grasshopper sparrows and chestnut-collared longspurs. A second component of this project consisted of installing 4,000 feet of fence to help facilitate grazing management options for the landowner. Fence material was provided via a cooperative agreement with the Butte Conservation District and the landowner installed the fence. Collectively, the grassland restoration and fence installation will provide additional grassland acres and enhanced grazing management options for the new seeding and adjacent native rangeland.

**Federal Trust Species:** Long-billed curlew, grasshopper sparrow, chestnut-collared longspur

## Goal II. Broaden and Strengthen Partnerships

During FY2015 the SD PFW program made significant progress in broadening and strengthening our partnership base by signing 149 new LAs with private landowners in our three focus areas. SD PFW also formalized several new funding partnerships with Pheasants Forever, the South Dakota Grassland Coalition and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. For example, the SD PFW program recently formalized a new \$200,000 funding initiative with the South Dakota Grassland Coalition and NFWF which will be the cornerstone of our 2016 effort in both the Southern Plains and High Plains focus areas. In addition, we worked with Pheasants Forever to secure a \$967,000 NAWCA grant for additional grassland and wetland work in the Prairie Pothole focus area. It is estimated that this newly approved NAWCA-based conservation initiative will result in over 300 new LAs in the next two years.

Accomplishment Type	2015 Accomplishment	2012 -2015 Accomplishment	2012 -2016 Goal	% Goal Completed
New landowner WEAs/LAs in the three SD PFW focus areas	149	891	650	137%

## Goal III. Improve Information Sharing and Communication



*Allen Olson, SD PFW biologist discussing grassland management at the 2015 PPJV Landowner Tour. Photo by Kurt Forman, USFWS.*

In 2015 we expanded our traditional network of communication and outreach tools to include hosting a PPJV landowner tour. We worked closely with the PPJV and the South Dakota Grassland Coalition to host a tour of working grasslands throughout the Missouri Coteau of South Dakota. Approximately 50 participants from across the nation attended the two-day event which consisted of a series of eight landowner presentations and associated field visits to three working ranches. By all accounts, the high point of the event was hearing first-hand examples from local landowners regarding the real world challenges and rewards of ranching in the PPJV.

Several of the landowners provided case histories of how changes in agricultural technology and economics have influenced the larger landscape of the Missouri Coteau. Others discussed site-specific grazing management practices and how they influence grassland ecology and livestock performance. A common theme throughout the discussions was the desire to maintain livestock ranching as an economically viable segment of South Dakota’s agricultural landscape and social fabric. NRCS provided a rainfall simulator presentation which perfectly complemented the field tour by illustrating the ability of healthy grasslands to protect soil, reduce runoff and recharge groundwater supplies. A wide variety of information was presented illustrating that ranching and bird conservation have much in common and the associated benefits have continental significance. Plans are already in motion for a follow-up tour in the spring of 2016 with a primary emphasis on developing specific conservation strategies and action items that will benefit both the landowners and landscapes of the PPJV.



*Landowners discussing grazing stewardship at the 2015 PPJV Landowner Tour. USFWS Photo.*

<b>Accomplishment Type</b>	<b>2015 Accomplishment</b>	<b>2012-2015 Accomplishment</b>	<b>2012-2016 Goal</b>	<b>% Goal Completed</b>
<b>Statewide-- Sponsor, attend or make PFW presentations at stake holder, landowner, educational, Congressional or other partner functions</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>87%</b>

## Goal IV. Enhance our Workforce

In FY 2015 SD PFW staff received training, guidance and technical updates on a wide variety of natural resource issues and new habitat conservation techniques. Most notably, on April 21, 2015, the SD PFW staff met jointly with the entire team of South Dakota Pheasants Forever biologists for a full day coordination session. As in previous years, the SD PFW program also held an annual staff meeting that covered a broad number of topics including recent changes in project permitting and advances in habitat restoration techniques. At the annual SD PFW staff meeting each PFW biologist provided details on the conservation practices they typically complete and their utility in grassland and wetland conservation. Additional topics addressed at the 2015 annual SD PFW staff meeting included a review of current funding levels, advances in wetland design and changes to cultural resource reviews. In addition to traditional training, the SD PFW program continues to encourage all staff to expand their responsibilities and gain new experiences in the PFW arena. In FY2015, SD PFW staff once again stepped up and participated in a variety of workgroups, meeting and planning sessions including the NGPJV technical committee, NRCS state technical committee and South Dakota Conservation Commission. In addition, Chuck Pyle (SD PFW biologist at the Huron WMD) was nominated and selected for the USFWS Stepping Up To Leadership program.

<b>Accomplishment Type</b>	<b>2015 Accomplishment</b>	<b>2012-2015 Accomplishment</b>	<b>2012-2016 Goal</b>	<b>% Goal Completed</b>
<b>Provide ongoing comprehensive natural resource, GIS and field technique training to each PFW biologist</b>	<b>28 hours/FTE</b>	<b>108 hours/FTE</b>	<b>200 hours/FTE</b>	<b>54%</b>

## V. Increase Accountability

In FY2015 the SD PFW program continued to strive to increase the accountability and efficiency of the program. Most notably, we continue to actively digitize all new LAs into a comprehensive Region 6 GIS layer that allows the Service to model the benefits of PFW habitat actions to select trust-species. Within the SD PFW Prairie Pothole focus area, the digitized PFW data provides a critical nexus with the Region 6 Habitat and Population Evaluation Team (HAPET) that helps allow HAPET to model recruitment benefit for five key species of upland nesting ducks. In combination, the current digitized data and our digitized “legacy data” from the previous 22+ years allows the SD PFW program to objectively quantify the biological benefits of past projects and more effectively target future conservation efforts.

<b>Accomplishment Type</b>	<b>2015 Accomplishment</b>	<b>2012-2015 Accomplishment</b>	<b>2012-2016 Goal</b>	<b>% Goal Completed</b>
<b>Enter new PFW projects into PLGIS as a basis for strategic modeling and evaluation to be completed in association with the Region 6 HAPET.</b>	<b>165 digitized LAs</b>	<b>988 digitized LAs &amp; WEAs</b>	<b>1,250 digitized LAs &amp; WEAs</b>	<b>79%</b>
<b>Consult on five university-level research projects with direct implication to PFW projects or trust species conservation</b>	<b>1 Research Project- Comment on a PhD project assessing landscape and wetland change in SD.</b>	<b>5 Research Projects- (1) Provide data and input on a PhD project to assess the socio-economic drivers of grassland loss in SD. (2) Provide peer-review for Wetlands Journal on a manuscript assessing wetland loss in the eastern Dakotas. (3) Provide input on a M.S. project to use remote imagery to assess landscape change in central SD. (4) Review and comment on a drainage tile manuscript. (5) Comment on a PhD project assessing landscape and wetland change in SD.</b>	<b>5 Research projects</b>	<b>100%</b>

### **Biological Outcomes (Prairie Pothole Focus Area)**

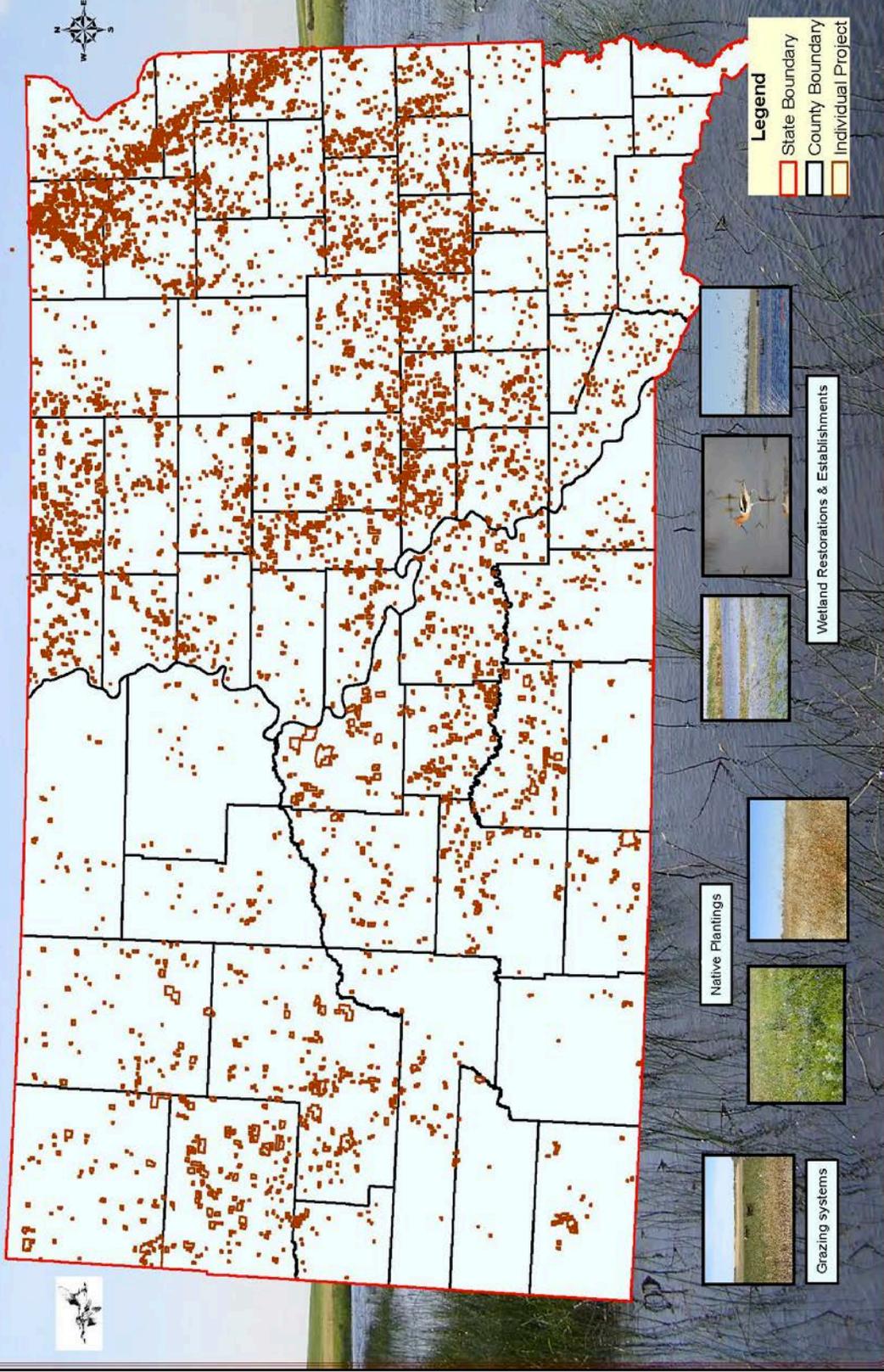
As in previous years, the South Dakota PFW program continues to work closely with the Region 6 HAPET office to quantify biological outcomes for five key upland nesting duck species (mallards, blue-winged teal, gadwall, northern pintail and northern shoveler). SD PFW staff have collaborated with HAPET to assess breeding pair and recruitment benefits associated with new LAs in the Prairie Pothole focus area of South Dakota. HAPET estimated that PFW habitat work projected to be completed during the next five years will result in positive recruitment and habitat maintenance benefits to 51,629 breeding pairs and 354,009 new recruits during the full course of the LA or associated conservation easement. For modeling purposes, LA benefits were projected to last 10 years and easement benefits were projected to last 99 years. See pages 124-125 of the 2012-2016 Region 6 PFW strategic plan for a more detailed analysis and assumptions used to derive these baseline estimates. Progress rates noted in the table below were derived by pro-rating the HAPET estimates of projected pairs and recruits according to actual SD PFW accomplishments. Progress towards the biological estimates in the 2012-2016 Region 6 PFW Strategic Plan continues to exceed our original estimates because of the growing association between PFW agreements and FWS conservation easements. For example, within the PPJV portion of South Dakota, 65% of the LAs signed in FY 2015 were completed in direct association with perpetual USFWS grassland and wetland conservation easements.

<b>Accomplishment Type</b>	<b>2015 Accomplishment</b>	<b>2012-2015 Accomplishment</b>	<b>2012-2016 Goal</b>	<b>% Goal Completed</b>
<b>Cumulative # of Breeding Pairs Benefited</b>	<b>14,668</b>	<b>87,101</b>	<b>51,629</b>	<b>169%</b>
<b>Cumulative # of Recruits Benefitted</b>	<b>76,792</b>	<b>372,884</b>	<b>354,009</b>	<b>105%</b>



*Wilson's phalaropes and northern shovelers on a HAPET shorebird survey transect in central South Dakota. The SD PFW program assists with a variety of biological surveys. USFWS photo.*

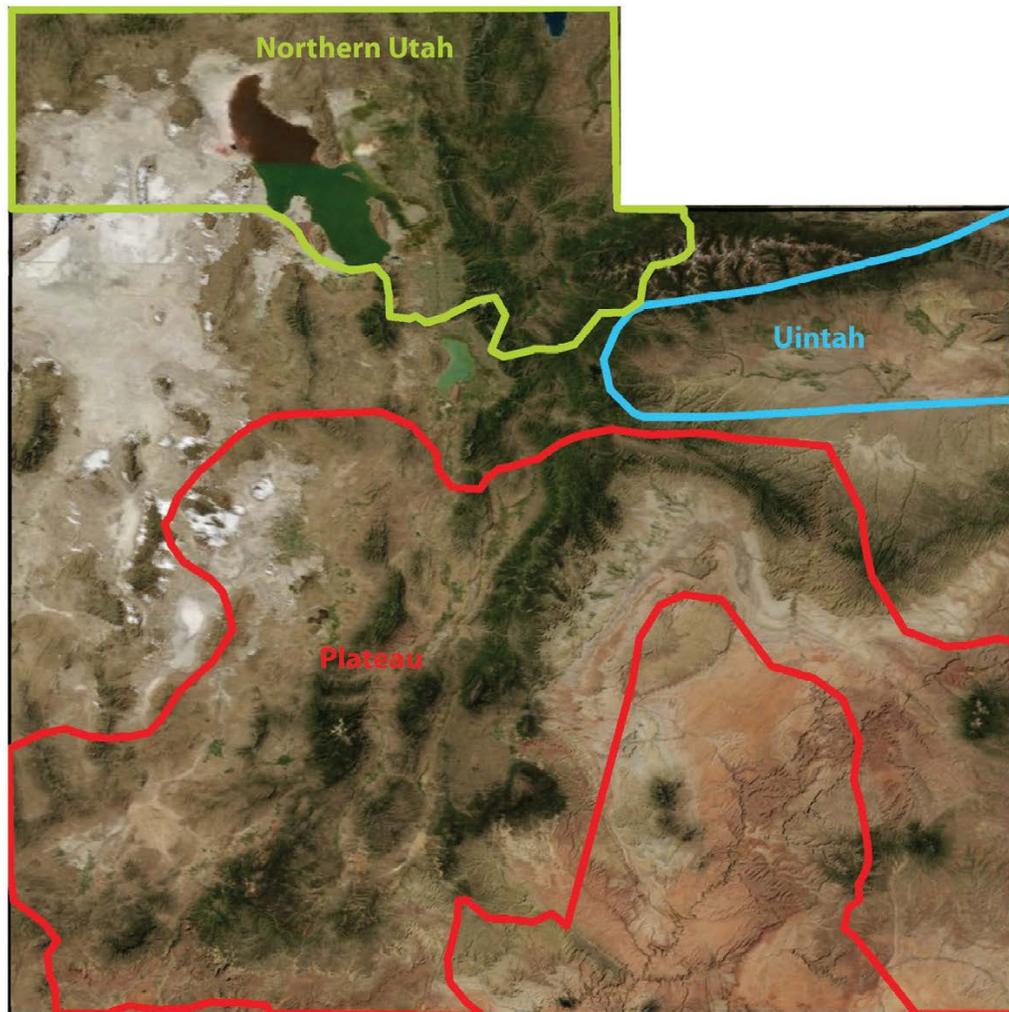
# South Dakota PFW Projects



*The SD PFW program has digitized over 7,000 LAs and WEAs. This GIS layer serves as a primary tool to help quantify biological outcomes of current projects and target delivery of future PFW work.*

## Utah Overview

The Partners program in Utah was able to complete 17 accomplishments in FY 2015 which accounted for 520 acres of restored/enhance habitat, and 456 acres having maintenance activities completed on them. The projects improved landowner uses while benefitting terrestrial, migratory, and aquatic species in the wide range of habitat types found in Utah. These accomplishments were a culmination of cooperative efforts between 11 willing landowners, dedicated conservation partners, and our boots on the ground PFW staff. One hundred percent of the projects completed in FY 2015 were completed in Utah focus areas.



*Utah PFW program Focus Areas. USFWS Map.*

Karl Flemming  
Utah Partners for Fish and Wildlife State Coordinator  
Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge  
2155 West Forest Street  
Brigham City, UT 84302  
435-734-6434

## Goal I. Conserve Habitat

Plateau Focus Area			
Habitat Type	FY 2015 Accomplishment (FY's Total)	FY 2012 - 2016 Goal	FY 2015 % of 5 Year Goal Completed (Total % completed)
Wetland (Acres)	83 (326)	35	237% (931%)
Upland (Acres)	1(524)	10000	0.1% (52.4%)
Riparian (miles)	0.5 (1.5)	4	12.5% (37.5%)
<b>Partnerships</b>			
# Private Landowners	6 (27)	30	20% (90%)
# Of new Partners	0 (4)	3	(133%)
Leveraging Ratio (Service : Partners)	1:5.6	1:3	186%
Technical Assistance days.	43(205)	150	29% (136%)

Riparian restoration on the Escalante River corridor received a lot of attention this year in the Plateau focus area. The key Service trust species that the riparian restoration projects benefitted were; yellow-billed cuckoo, southwestern willow flycatcher, Virginia's warbler, black-throated gray warbler, common yellow-throat, and broad-tailed hummingbird. The riparian restoration activities consisted primarily of removing invasive woody species such as Russian olive and salt cedar and planting native woody plants. The plantings consisted of bare root stock, potted plants and cuttings. Funding provided by the Walton Foundation to the PFW program was the primary source of funding provided by PFW. The major partners in this effort included Forestry Fire & State Lands, Grand Staircase Escalante Partners, Utah Division of Wildlife Resources, Utah's Watershed Restoration Program, and numerous volunteers.



*Mechanized auger being used to dig a hole for potted plants. USFWS photo.*



*Volunteers planting potted plants at a PFW restoration site. USFWS photo.*



*PFW-funded riparian restoration project site after removal of invasive Russian olive. USFWS photo.*

<b>Northern Utah Focus Area</b>			
Habitat Type	FY 2015 Accomplishment (FY's Totals)	FY 2012 - 2016 Goal	FY 2013 % of 5 Year Goal Completed (total % completed)
Wetland (Acres)	357 (1,516)	500	71% (300%)
Upland (Acres)	78 (4,838)	8625	4% (55%)
Riparian (miles)	(2.8)	10	(28.0%)
Fish Passage (units)	(13)	10	(130.0%)
<b>Partnerships</b>			
# Private Landowners	5 (14)	55	9% (25%)
# Of new Partners	(4)	10	(40%)
Leveraging Ratio (Service : Partners)	1:6	1:3	200%
Technical Assistance days.	71(232)	150	47% (153%)

Most of the work completed in the Northern Utah focus area was related to wetland enhancement this year. Practices consisted of replacing water control structures, repairing dikes, and removing silt from wetland basins. The silt removal required specialized equipment and the PFW program coordinated the use of staff and equipment from the Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge. A tracked tractor, dump box to haul the silt and an operator were provided for a month to complete the silt removal on a project. The silt was placed on upland sites and seeded with a grass and forb mixture to potentially provide nesting habitat for waterfowl. Some of the species that benefitted from these wetland enhancement projects include; Northern pintails, cinnamon teal, mallards, gadwalls, green-winged teal, black necked stilts, white-faced ibis, and American avocets.

*Silt removal from a wetland basin. USFWS photo.*





*Black-necked stilt using the wetland area after silt was removed. USFWS photo.*



*Repaired dike within PFW-funded project site. USFWS photo.*

<b>Uintah Focus Area</b>			
<b>Habitat Type</b>	<b>FY 2015 Accomplishment</b>	<b>FY 2012 - 2016 Goal</b>	<b>% of 5 Year Goal Completed</b>
Upland (Acres)	0	0	280%
<b>Partnerships</b>			
# Private Landowners	0(2)	5	20%
# Of new Partners	0		0%
Leveraging Ratio (Service : Partners)	1:1	1:3	
Technical Assistance days.	4(19)	50	8% (38%)

## **Goal II. Broaden and Strengthen Partnerships**

UT PFW staff provided technical assistance to support a local greater sage-grouse working group and conservation efforts on private land.

## **Goal III. Improve Information Sharing and Communication**

UT PFW staff attended the following meetings; state technical committee, Intermountain West Joint Venture, seven sage-grouse working groups, Rich and West Box Elder county Coordinated Resource Management planning sessions, Bear River Watershed Conservation Area planning, The Nature Conservancy's (TNC) Conservation Action Planning, and local Conservation District meetings.

Worked with a private landowner who we had helped submit a successful small NAWCA grant implement the grant and submit the required reports.

The technical assistance days consisted of working with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and providing input regarding the implementation of farm bill programs such as the Wetland Reserve Program the Sage grouse initiative and the development of a NAWCA grant for the Bear River Watershed/Great Salt Lake area.

## **Goal IV. Enhance Workforce**

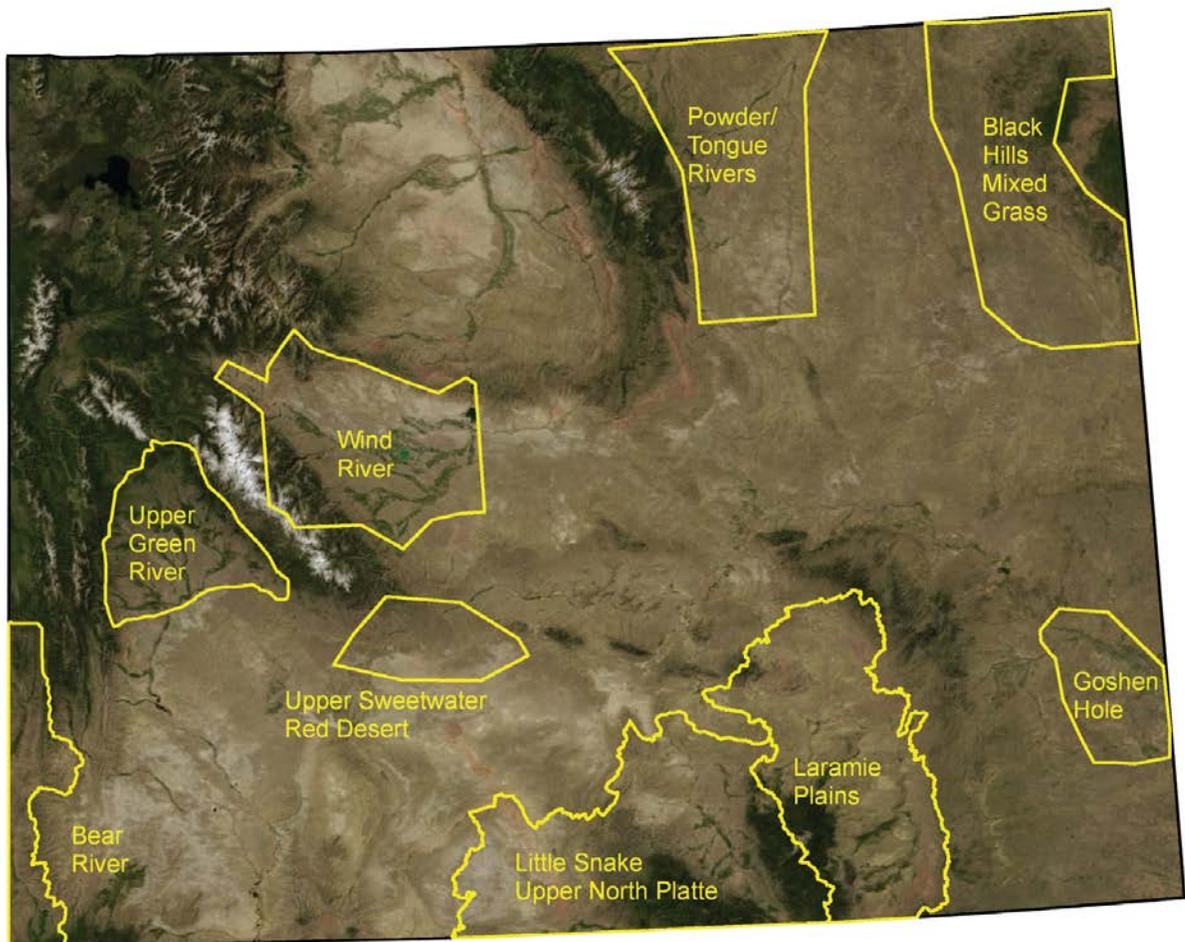
All mandatory training was completed (i.e., EEO, No FEAR) and employee performance and appraisal plans were developed and discussed with all PFW staff.

## **Goal V. Increase Accountability**

One hundred percent of the projects completed this year were within HabITS focus areas and all projects were linked to a Service trust species.

## Wyoming Overview

This is a report of accomplishments and activities we implemented this past year to address PFW program goals of conserving habitat, broaden and strengthen partnerships, improve information sharing and communication, enhance our workforce, and increase accountability. These 5 major goals were identified within the national Vision Document for the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program and put to work at the state level through the development of 5 year work plans or state level strategic plans. Our Wyoming PFW strategic plan was developed with the assistance of our many conservation partners and built on a watershed or landscape level platform which we call focus areas. Our annual report flows in a similar fashion as our strategic plan providing the reader a glimpse of what activities are taking place in Wyoming by an impressive team of conservation partners.



*Wyoming PFW program Focus Areas. USFWS Map.*

Mark Hogan  
Wyoming PFW Program State Coordinator  
170 North First Street  
Lander, WY 82520  
307-332-8719

## Goal I. Conserve Habitat

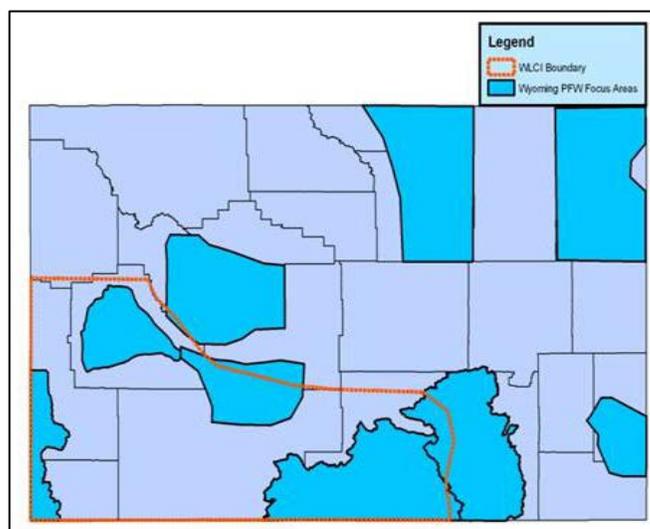
There are many challenges facing Wyoming private landowners and public land managers, primarily accelerated habitat fragmentation and loss from energy development, urban expansion and in general wildlands being converted to commercial uses. These challenges are being met by the broader conservation community in a large coordinated effort using a variety of traditional tools, including habitat restoration programs and long term conservation easements. In addition, habitat conservation strategies are continually being developed to adapt conservation to an ever changing environment; examples provided in the report include utilizing the latest research to improve endangered species reintroduction efforts as well as projects highlighting creative collaborative efforts to benefit both wildlife and human resources. In 2015, Wyoming PFW program utilized a variety of Service dollars to restore, create, and enhance wildlife habitat on private and tribal lands, more than \$217,676 FWS program dollars were used to match \$1,278,353 donated private, state and federal funds for a 6:1 match.

<b>Wyoming PFW Statewide Activities - Cumulative Accomplishments 2015</b>				
<b>Habitat Type</b>	<b>2015 Accomplishments</b>	<b>2012-15 Accomplishments</b>	<b>FY 2012-2016 5 Yr Target</b>	<b>% 5-yr Goal Completed</b>
<b>Stream Enhancement (ft)</b>	<b>40,128.0</b>	<b>68,619.0</b>	<b>63,000</b>	<b>109%</b>
<b>Riparian Enhancement (miles)</b>	<b>19.5</b>	<b>62.6</b>	<b>119</b>	<b>53%</b>
<b>Wetland Restoration (acres)</b>	<b>223.0</b>	<b>1,709.0</b>	<b>1,125</b>	<b>152 %</b>
<b>Upland Enhancement (acres)</b>	<b>11,846.0</b>	<b>53,830.0</b>	<b>121,700</b>	<b>44%</b>
<b>Fish Passage/screens (units)</b>	<b>2.0</b>	<b>12.0</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>57%</b>

Forecasting habitat restoration opportunities is complex with many variables including working within a framework of voluntary habitat restoration programs, individual landowner financial and economic situations, amount of public lands within a given focus area, and program budgets. What helps balance uncertainty with project delivery consistency is PFW staff longevity and retention, program delivery history and long term partner relationships.

### Wyoming Landscape Conservation Initiative (WLCI)

Initiated in 2008, the mission of WLCI is to implement a long-term science-based program to assess and enhance the quality and quantity of aquatic and terrestrial habitats at a landscape scale in southwest Wyoming while facilitating responsible energy development. The WLCI is an interagency working group of partners including government and non-government organizations which is then stepped down to Local Project Development Teams (LPDT) made up of local resource staff, conservation districts, landowners, county commissioners, and other interested parties tasked to identify important local landscape level resource issues and address these through cooperatively created projects. PFW staff



<b>WLCI PFW Program Accomplishments</b>		
<b>Habitat Type</b>	<b>2015 Accomplishments</b>	<b>PFW WLCI Accomplishment FY 2008-15</b>
<b>Stream (ft)</b>	<b>40,128.0</b>	<b>139,224.0</b>
<b>Riparian (miles)</b>	<b>19.5</b>	<b>97.4</b>
<b>Wetland (acres)</b>	<b>174.0</b>	<b>2,046.0</b>
<b>Upland (acres)</b>	<b>11,846.0</b>	<b>63,304.0</b>
<b>Fish Passage/ Screens (units)</b>	<b>2.0</b>	<b>21.0</b>

contributes greatly to the success of WLCI by being the primary driver of private lands projects.

### **Focus Area Accomplishments and Project Highlights**

The following five PFW focus areas are associated with WLCI the Bear River, Upper Green River, Upper Sweetwater/Red Desert, Laramie Plains, and Little Snake /Upper North Platte River. Tables below are a complete breakdown of habitat project acres and miles completed in FY2015, including the percent completed toward our 5 year habitat restoration goals set forth in our updated Wyoming PFW Strategic Plan 2012-2016.

<b>Bear River Focus Area</b>				
<b>Habitat Type</b>	<b>FY 2012-15 Accomplishments</b>	<b>FY 2015 Accomplishments</b>	<b>FY 2012-2016 Goal</b>	<b>% 5-year Goal Completed</b>
<b>Stream Enhancement (ft)</b>	<b>7,497.6</b>	<b>2,745.6</b>	<b>10,000</b>	<b>75.0%</b>
<b>Riparian Enhancement(miles)</b>	<b>1.7</b>	<b>0.5</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>17.0%</b>
<b>Wetland Restoration (acres)</b>	<b>978.0</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>500</b>	<b>195.0%</b>
<b>Upland Enhancement (acres)</b>	<b>550.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>2,000</b>	<b>28.0%</b>
<b>Fish Passage/screens (units)</b>	<b>5.0</b>	<b>2.0</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>63.0%</b>

<b>Upper Green River Focus Area</b>				
<b>Habitat Type</b>	<b>FY 2012-15 Accomplishments</b>	<b>FY 2015 Accomplishments</b>	<b>FY 2012-2016 Goal</b>	<b>% 5-year Goal Completed</b>
<b>Stream Enhancement (ft)</b>	<b>6,336.0</b>	<b>6,336.0</b>	<b>10,000</b>	<b>63.0%</b>
<b>Riparian Enhancement(miles)</b>	<b>2.4</b>	<b>2.4</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>24.0%</b>
<b>Wetland Restoration (acres)</b>	<b>58.5</b>	<b>53.5</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>73.0%</b>
<b>Upland Enhancement (acres)</b>	<b>227.0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2,000</b>	<b>11.0%</b>
<b>Fish Passage/screens (units)</b>	<b>2.0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>60.0%</b>

<b>Laramie Plains Focus Area</b>				
<b>Habitat Type</b>	<b>FY 2012-15 Accomplishments</b>	<b>FY 2015 Accomplishments</b>	<b>FY 2012-2016 Goal</b>	<b>% 5-year Goal Completed</b>
<b>Stream Enhancement (ft)</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>7,000</b>	<b>0%</b>
<b>Riparian Enhancement (miles)</b>	<b>4.2</b>	<b>2.4</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>14%</b>
<b>Wetland Restoration (acres)</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>0%</b>
<b>Upland Enhancement (acres)</b>	<b>2,426.0</b>	<b>2,296.0</b>	<b>70,000</b>	<b>3%</b>
<b>Fish Passage/screens (units)</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0%</b>

<b>Little Snake /Upper North Platte River Focus Area</b>				
<b>Habitat Type</b>	<b>FY 2012-15 Accomplishments</b>	<b>FY 2015 Accomplishments</b>	<b>FY 2012-2016 Goal</b>	<b>% 5-year Goal Completed</b>
<b>Stream Enhancement (ft)</b>	<b>34,584.0</b>	<b>22,968.0</b>	<b>20,000</b>	<b>172.0%</b>
<b>Riparian Enhancement(miles)</b>	<b>5.3</b>	<b>3.8</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>15%</b>
<b>Wetland Restoration (acres)</b>	<b>83.3</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>111%</b>
<b>Upland Enhancement (acres)</b>	<b>3,857.0</b>	<b>2003.0</b>	<b>25,000</b>	<b>15%</b>
<b>Fish Passage/screens (units)</b>	<b>3.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>60%</b>

<b>Wind River Focus Area</b>				
<b>Habitat Type</b>	<b>FY 2012 - 15 Accomplishments</b>	<b>FY 2015 Accomplishments</b>	<b>FY 2012-2016 Goal</b>	<b>% 5-year Goal Completed</b>
<b>Stream Enhancement (ft)</b>	<b>15,840</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5,000</b>	<b>316%</b>
<b>Riparian Enhancement(miles)</b>	<b>26.87</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>134%</b>
<b>Wetland Restoration (acres)</b>	<b>330.6</b>	<b>16.1</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>110%</b>
<b>Upland Enhancement (acres)</b>	<b>34,446</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>10,000</b>	<b>344%</b>
<b>Fish Passage/screens (units)</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>150%</b>

## **Project Example 1**

**HabITS ID:** 962653

**Project title:** Bear River Focus Area Fish Passage Project

**Date of final project completion:** August 2015

**Project location details:** Yellow Creek

### **Narrative summary of the project:**

During August 2015, 2 fish passage barriers were eliminated, 3 instream structures were installed, and 265 feet of stream was restored on Yellow Creek in the Bear River Focus Area. Upper Yellow Creek is one of the more important range-wide habitats for northern leatherside chub, a rare native fish and a Wyoming Species of Greatest Conservation Need. Some habitats such as Yellow Creek may dry up seasonally in below-average precipitation years, so biologists believe that occasional movements to “refuge” areas may be important to persistence of the species.

The fish’s small body size and weak swimming ability prevent it from moving upstream through high water velocity areas such as in culverts. The project removed one small culvert and another was replaced with a much larger culvert making the road crossing passable for upstream migration when needed. In order to maintain culvert inlet and outlet with natural channel stream level, 3 rock riffle grade control structures were installed in Yellow Creek to prevent stream incision and perched culvert potential becoming a future barrier.

As typical for Wyoming Partners for Fish and Wildlife projects, additional funding and assistance came from several conservation partners including the private landowner, Wyoming Game and Fish Department, Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resource Trust, Uinta County Conservation District, and the USFWS Lander Fish and Wildlife Management Assistance Office.

**Target species:** Northern leatherside chub



*Before and after culvert replacement along Yellow Creek, Wyoming. USFWS Photo.*

## **Project Example 2**

**HabITS ID:** 940813

**Project title:** Upper Green River Focus Area Wetland Restoration Project

**Date of final project completion:** FY 2015

**Project location details:** New Fork Potholes region

### **Narrative summary of the project:**

A multi-year effort to restore 32.8 wetland acres in the renowned New Fork Potholes region of the Upper Green River Focus Area was completed in fall 2014. The New Fork Potholes region has been documented as having the second highest breeding duck pair densities in Wyoming, and the highest densities for diving ducks, including Wyoming Species of Greatest Conservation Need lesser scaup and canvasback.

The project area includes glaciated pothole wetlands, many of which had drainage ditches constructed on them to dry the wetlands for annual haying. Twenty-two of these drainage ditches were filled and water control structures installed to increase wetland diversity and extend the basin hydro-period. The water control structures were installed for water management flexibility for the landowner, since much of the area is now irrigated.



*Before (left) and after (right) restoration efforts. USFWS photos.*

An additional benefit of the projects, which occurred on perpetually conserved easement land, was improving late brood-rearing cover for greater sage-grouse. The projects are also inside State of Wyoming greater sage-grouse Core Area, and grouse are commonly observed in the area.

Project partners included the private landowner, Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resource Trust, Wyoming Game and Fish Department, Sublette County Conservation District, and North American Wetlands Conservation Act.

**Federal Trust Species:** Greater sage-grouse, cinnamon teal, lesser scaup, canvasback

### **Project Example 3**

**Project title:** Laramie Plains Focus Area Wetland Enhancement Project

**Date of final project completion:** FY 2015

**Project location details:** Laramie Rivers Conservation District area

#### **Narrative summary of the project:**

Developing connections with people and fostering positive communication is crucial to successfully reintroducing threatened and endangered species in Wyoming. Building private landowner relationships with a strong foundation of trust often puts PFW staff in the best position to facilitate and negotiate reintroduction sites for endangered species like the Wyoming Toad.

Wyoming PFW staff worked cooperatively with USFWS Ecological Services - Cheyenne and the Laramie Rivers Conservation District to develop a Safe Harbor Agreement that allows for the release of the endangered Wyoming toad on a PFW project. During the winter 2015, PFW developed and implemented a habitat improvement plan that created six habitat areas. Each site optimized solar warming to expedite tadpole metamorphosis. Sites were tailored to accommodate “soft-release” tadpole enclosures that would later be used for reintroduction, research and monitoring conducted by the University of Wyoming. Each location incorporated a constructed feature with groundwater connection that will improve reintroduction success in drought years. This year, 2,776 tadpoles, 115 toadlets, and 31 adult Wyoming toads were reintroduced into our habitat improvement area.

**Federal Trust Species:** Wyoming toad



*Soft-release enclosures that protects tadpoles from aquatic and terrestrial predators.  
USFWS Photos.*



*Establishing deeper water pockets in shallow ponds ensures that late season water is available for Wyoming Toad tadpoles. USFWS Photos.*

## **Project Example 4**

**HabITS ID:** 962313

**Project title:** Little Snake /Upper North Platte River Focus Area River Restoration Project

**Date of final project completion:** FY 2015

**Project location details:** Encampment River

### **Narrative summary of the project:**

Like many western rivers, the Encampment River has suffered for more than a century of destructive activities including dredging, impounding, and water withdrawals resulting in a river that is experiencing 20-100ft of accelerated lateral migration annually.

The project is a continuation of a multi-agency collaborative effort to restore the complete river and in 2015, approximately 1,200 feet of both instream and riparian habitat was restored on the Encampment River. In-stream restoration work utilized natural channel design techniques to improve the shape, pattern, and profile of the channel. Partnerships with the Wyoming Game and Fish Department, Trout Unlimited, the Natural Resource Conservation Service and the Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resource Trust Fund resulted in the installation of 250 feet of toe wood, two constructed riffles, two constructed pools, and six modified rock vanes.

Instream structures provided immediate river stability benefits while long term success is dependent upon developing a healthy and diverse riparian plant community. As a part of the Landowner Agreement, the ranch manager and PFW mutually agreed to develop a ten year livestock grazing plan that will regulate the season, limit intensity and duration of cattle use in the riparian area. Over 100 willow clumps and related native tree plantings were installed along the riparian corridor.

**Federal Trust Species:** Migratory birds



*Willow plantings along constructed riffle (left) and newly installed riparian fence.  
USFWS photos.*

## **Project Example 5**

**HabITS ID:** 962873

**Project title:** WRR Wetland Maintenance Project

**Date of final project completion:** FY 2015

**Project location details:** Wind River Focus Area

### **Narrative summary of the project:**

Much needed maintenance was performed on Mission Ponds #2, one of three wetlands created through the construction of a series of low level dikes and utilization of produced water from the adjacent Mexican Flats Oil Field. The 16 acre shallow wetland has been in place since 2001 and was in jeopardy of complete failure from pipe corrosion. PFW paid for the water control structure and Marathon Oil installed the structure using their equipment and manpower. The saline nature of these ponds is hard on corrugated metal necessitating a change to high density polyethylene materials, yet at the same time the saline water chemistry makes the project a favorite for migrating wading and shorebirds.

Our conservation partners continue to advance habitat restoration and improvement within un-staffed focus areas of Goshen Hole, Black Hills Mixed Grass, and Powder Tongue River. The State Wetland Working Group has made the Goshen Hole and Bear River Complex top priority areas for waterfowl habitat improvement and capacity building. We will continue to explore avenues to assist with the man-power shortfall that exists for all our partners in un-staffed focus area and support project development on a “as need” basis.

While the majority of PFW projects can be found within designated focus areas, high value restoration opportunities come to us from time to time outside our priority area polygons. This year, approximately 9.9 miles of riparian/wet meadow habitat and 7,547 sage steppe acres were improved outside of these lines representing 51% and 63% of the total PFW work completed within their respective categories. The program remains flexible enough to incorporate projects that target high priority focal species with large ranges such as sage grouse as was the case for acres tallied under FY15 can be primarily attributed to a project (HabITS Project # 942593) that lies within the greater WLCI boundary and associated with the Green River system.

### **Federal Trust Species:** Migratory birds



## **Project Example 6**

**HabITS ID:** 959593

**Project title:** Laramie Plains Focus Areas Project

**Date of final project completion:** FY 2015

**Project location details:** Laramie Rivers Conservation District area

### **Narrative summary of the project:**

In 2015, PFW entered a unique partnership with the Wyoming Conservation Corp (WCC) operated through the University of Wyoming with a mission to provide its college-aged members with an opportunity to learn first-hand the complexity involved with natural resource management. The 27 WCC students and their leaders conducted a 3-day educational and safety training session at a PFW project in the Laramie Plains Focus Area.

This collaborative project emphasized improving both the ranching operation and wildlife habitat in a wetland surrounded by mixed grass prairie. Building a fence to keep cattle out of a 23 acre wetland was necessary to break cattle-born intestinal disease cycle that plagued yearling cattle on the ranch while providing secure nesting habitat and building “character” with WCC students. A second phase of the project is to restore natural hydrology by breaching/plugging irrigation delivery ditches that bisect the watershed which historically vented water away from the wetland.

The WCC provided the labor force as part of a training exercise that would prepare their teams for their summer field season in Wyoming. PFW and the Laramie Rivers Conservation District provide fencing materials and the rancher committed to complete earthwork associated with the hydrology restoration. While on site, the WCC team leaders taught students how to construct 4,000 linear feet of fence using proper safety techniques. Students met with the rancher and PFW biologist to discuss how this “win-win” opportunity developed from beginning to end using positive communication and by making the most of every partner and project opportunity.

**Federal Trust Species:** Migratory birds



*PFW Biologist, Mindy Meade providing fence building instructions. USFWS Photo.*

## **Project Example 7**

**HabITS ID:** 942593

**Project title:** Stream Channel Reconnection Project

**Date of final project completion:** FY 2015

**Project location details:** Albert Creek

### **Narrative summary of the project:**

Approximately 11,097 feet of Albert Creek was restored in early spring 2015 for the benefit of greater sage-grouse and other sage-steppe wildlife species such as pygmy rabbit, pronghorn antelope, and mule deer. Albert Creek is a seasonal stream that was historically dammed in several locations for livestock water. The dams were not reliable water sources and rerouted the creek in a different direction for over 1 mile of valley distance. The “new” channel was straight, highly incised with extreme stream-bank erosion and very little riparian vegetation. The “old” channel, dried up by the dam, was sinuous with good herbaceous riparian vegetation. In less than one year, PFW staff designed, permitted, utilized funding from a partnership cooperative agreement and provided the necessary construction oversight to restore Albert Creek to its former channel.

To restore Albert Creek, small dams were removed and earthen plugs were placed in the active creek channel to return Albert Creek to its historic channel elevating local water tables, rewetting adjacent floodplain and associated wet meadow habitat. One of several habitat benefits of the project is to enhance the mesic late brood-rearing habitat of the riparian area for greater sage-grouse. Another important component of the project was developing reliable livestock water in the pasture by installing two large livestock water-tanks supplied by a nearby spring. This enhanced 7,548 acres of private land habitat in the pasture served by the water development (An additional 6,400 acres of checkerboard BLM and State lands are in the pasture and benefitted by the project, but are not claimed in HABITs). The landowners are also partnering with the NRCS Sage-Grouse Initiative and PFW Program to implement a rest-rotation grazing system and develop other water sources in the pasture.

Albert Creek restoration was completed on private land with the support of a \$5,000 contribution from participating landowner, \$8,598 from Partners for Fish and Wildlife, Wyoming Landscape Conservation Initiative Funds (WLCI) and \$400 of assistance from Uinta County Conservation District.

**Federal Trust Species:** Greater sage-grouse, migratory birds



*Albert Creek floodplain before (left) and after restoration activities. USFWS photos.*



*Albert Creek channel before (left) and after restoration activities. USFWS photos.*

### **Habitat Restoration Efforts Outside of PFW Focus Areas**

While the majority of PFW projects can be found within designated focus areas, high value restoration opportunities come to us from time to time outside our priority area polygons. This year, approximately 9.9 miles of riparian/wet meadow habitat and 7,547 sage steppe acres were improved outside of these lines representing 51% and 63% of the total PFW work completed within their respective categories. The program remains flexible enough to incorporate projects that target high priority focal species with large ranges such as sage grouse as was the case for acres tallied under FY15 can be primarily attributed to a project (HabITS Project # 942593) that lies within the greater WLCI boundary and associated with the Green River system.

<b>Projects completed outside of PFW focus areas</b>	<b>PFW FY 2015 Accomplishment</b>
<b>Stream (ft)</b>	<b>11,097.0</b>
<b>Riparian (miles)</b>	<b>9.9</b>
<b>Wetland (acres)</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>Upland (acres)</b>	<b>7,547</b>
<b>Fish Passage/screens (units)</b>	<b>0</b>

## Goal II. Broaden and Strengthen Partnerships

The sharing of restoration and partnership expertise between stakeholders is an important driver in the success of PFW restoration efforts. The working knowledge and technical expertise contributions of Partners Program staff continues to be an integral component in individual partnership project success as well as a restoration and conservation technique driver of change statewide. As new initiatives come on-line, shared positions have improved project coordination between the agencies at the field level, increased project initiation rates, as well as serving to bridge the gap between funding programs and partners. Being part of an office team, PFW staff members make themselves available to their local duty station as a valued biological resource (Evanston Forest Service, Laramie NRCS/Laramie Rivers Conservation District and Lander Fish and Wildlife Management Assistance Office).

In 2015, a rangeland specialist partnership position was developed in conjunction with the National Refuge Association for Southwest Wyoming and Northeast Utah working across a diverse ownership pattern of federal, state and private lands for the benefit of large range species like sage grouse and mule deer. The range ecologists will conduct rangeland and wildlife assessments, identify resource concerns and landowner objectives, develop plans to address those concerns and objectives, and implement plan strategies using a variety of cost-share programs.



*PFW, NRCS, TNC, TU and MBCD Board Members. USFWS photo.*

## Goal III. Improve Information Sharing and Communication

Wyoming PFW continues to work through traditional avenues of USDA State Technical Committee meetings, local USDA work groups, and various partner coordination functions as well as giving presentations on habitat restoration techniques and habitat project updates at several gatherings of professionals including several Fish and Wildlife agency and conservation

partner annual meetings. PFW staff members routinely attend local interagency meetings within their respective work areas which include representation from local county commissioners to congressional staffers providing a good forum for periodic program updates. PFW maintains a place in the classroom through local science fair judging and participating in a variety of youth outdoor classroom experiences held around the state. A good example of these types of efforts is utilizing Wyoming Conservation Corp assistance to complete a PFW project.

#### **Goal IV. Enhance our Workforce**

Wyoming PFW continues to build on a strong technical assistance foundation delivering habitat conservation effectively by improving workforce capacity when necessary and improve existing technical and leadership skills of staff to meet the needs of our conservation partners and trust resource responsibilities. Staff works closely with conservation partners providing restoration guidance on a variety of habitat projects within their dedicated work areas, including project designs and permitting, project cost analysis, and appropriate construction methodologies.

Wyoming PFW and Natural Resource Conservation Service staff teamed up to provide a five-day wetland plant identification course in Lander using PFW projects sites as the outdoor classroom. A secondary benefit from the training was wetland plant lists developed for several locations will aide in the screening process for determining future suitable sites for trumpeter swan re-introductions in the valley.

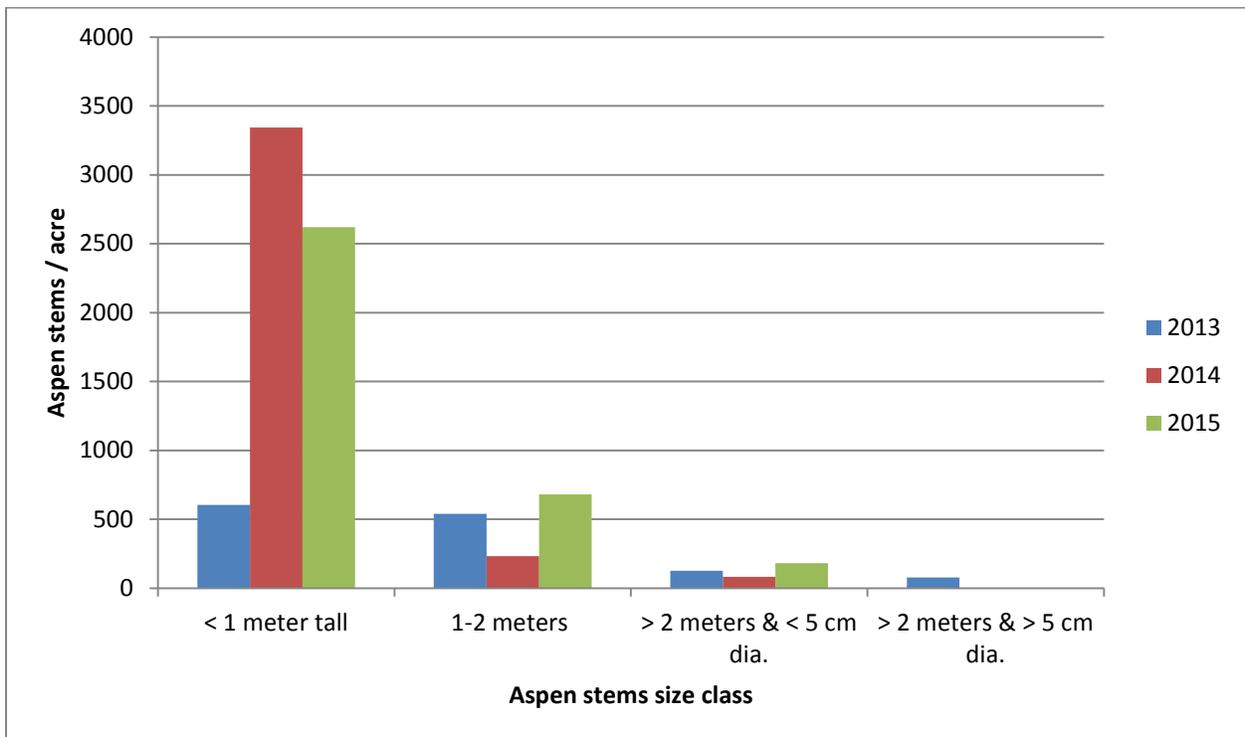


*Fort Worth, TX, NRCS Tech Center staff and students. USFWS photo.*

## Goal V. Increase Accountability

In the past, Wyoming PFW monitored approximately 5% of active projects in three areas: structural function, habitat response, and biological benefits. In 2015, this monitoring process was standardized in a formal structure using available measurable parameters to evaluate project success. Three levels of monitoring are recognized within this monitoring plan framework, status review, site-scale and landscape scale. The following is an example of level two monitoring put into action for FY15.

Project Monitoring, Aspen Regeneration Project: The PFW Program has been monitoring aspen regeneration from a 2013 habitat treatment to benefit migratory songbird nesting habitat, greater sage-grouse late brood-rearing habitat, and habitat for a wide variety of other game and non-game species. The aspen stem density data and repeat photo-points indicate that aspen is on its way to becoming a bigger part of the long-term habitat at this site compared to prior to treatment in 2013. Of particular importance is the increase in aspen suckers > 2 meters tall and < 5 centimeters in diameter, as they correspond to a young cohort of future mature trees that have grown above the browsing height of most ungulate browsers of aspen.





*Pretreatment aspen stand (left) with limited aspen re-generation and conifer encroachment, July 2013. Post-treatment photo (right) of same location with young aspens in foreground, September 2015. USFWS photos.*



