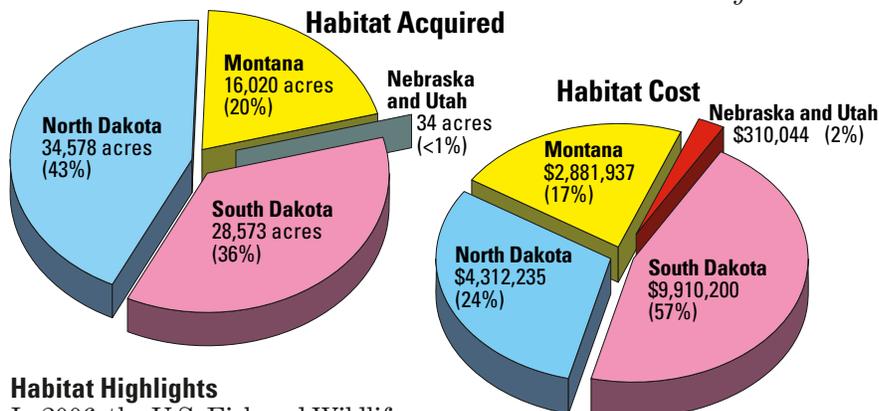


2006 Annual Report

Division of Realty

Mountain-Prairie Region

Rocky Mountain Front - Conversation Easement / USFWS



Habitat Highlights

In 2006, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), Mountain-Prairie Region (also known as Region 6), Division of Realty, protected 333 tracts of land totaling 79,204 acres. Realty staff located in North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, and Colorado worked as a team to preserve this critical, high quality habitat through fee and easement purchases. The majority of these acres were protected in North and South Dakota by purchasing minimally restrictive wetland and grassland easements within areas identified as the best waterfowl habitat in the prairie pothole portion of Region 6. Important habitat in Montana, Nebraska, and Utah was protected through the use of more restrictive conservation easements and fee title acquisition. In Colorado, property was transferred to the Service from

other Federal and State agencies, adding 8,527 acres to the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Ducks Unlimited (DU), one of the Service's valued partners in habitat conservation, donated to the Service 64 grassland and wetland easements in North and South Dakota totaling 26,189 acres valued at \$3,306,426. (These acres are included in the 79,204 acres figure cited above.) Of this dollar amount, \$2,512,000 was provided through the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) via grants supported by DU's Grasslands for Tomorrow initiative. The collaboration

between the Service and DU, using NAWCA grants to fund wetland and grassland easements, has been a very successful partnership for the last 9 years.

The Nature Conservancy (TNC), another significant partner in habitat conservation, donated \$480,000 used to acquire a conservation easement on 3,340 acres along the north side of Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge (NWR). This donation was part of the Service's Centennial Valley conservation easement program. Montana's Centennial Valley is one of the most biologically

(Continued on page 2)



Red Rock Lakes Conservation Easement
USFWS

Habitat Highlights

(Continued from page 1)

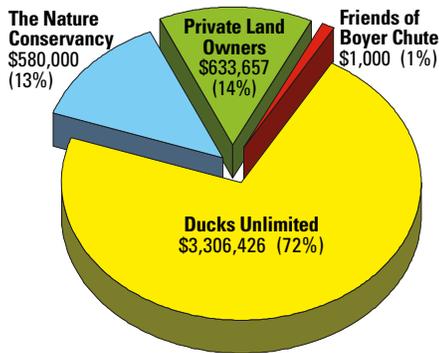
rich valleys in the west. It has the largest wetland complex in the Greater Yellowstone Region, supporting 270 bird species, including trumpeter swans, peregrine falcons, and ferruginous hawks. Red Rock Creek, which flows into Red Rock Lakes NWR, is one of only two streams in the lower 48 states to support indigenous populations of arctic grayling. Further more, TNC donated \$100,000 to a new land preservation project within the Service known as the Rocky Mountain Front Conservation Area. This acquisition is part of a

larger initiative to protect up to 170,000 acres in Montana, along the eastern front of the continental divide, which is further detailed in the first paragraph of *New and Additional Refuge Lands* article in this annual report.

Another habitat preservation accomplishment owes its success, in part, to the generosity of private landowners. In four separate transactions, these landowners agreed to bargain sales with the Service. A bargain sale is an agreement between the landowner and the Service where

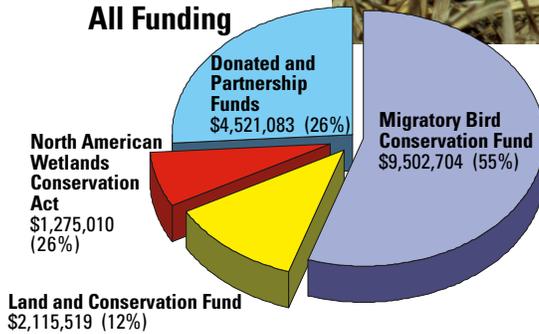
the landowner voluntarily agrees to accept payment of less than fair market value for the property interest being acquired. Therefore, the landowner donates (foregoes payment for) the difference in land value between the fair market value and the actual amount of payment. In Montana, two conservation easements were acquired through bargain sales where the landowners donated a total land value of \$439,257. In South Dakota, two grassland easements were acquired using bargain sales with a total donated land value of \$194,400.

Financial Contributions from Partners



Great Blue Heron; Huron, South Dakota / USFWS

All Funding



Touring the Region

Mitch King, Region 6 Regional Director, on a tour of the Region, visiting with landowner, Gene Hetletved, who signed an easement agreement with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service through Realty Specialist, Tammy Fairbanks.



Pelicans; Kulm Wetland Management District / USFWS

2006 Funding Summary

There are several funding sources utilized by the Region 6, Realty Division to accomplish fee title and easement acquisitions. In 2006, the Realty Division's activities were primarily funded by the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund (MBCF). MBCF is funded by the sale of Duck Stamps (i.e., hunting licenses), and in some states, the tax revenue from the sale of ammunition and artillery. The majority of grassland and wetland easements acquired by the Service each year are paid for with MBCF funds. MBCF dollars accounted for 55% of Region 6 total monies spent on land acquisitions, specifically \$9,502,704 in 2006.

In addition, wildlife habitat is also protected using dollars from the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). These funds are appropriated by the U.S. Congress through its budgetary process each year. LWCF comprised 12% of Region 6's land acquisition budget this year, providing \$2,115,519 for land preservation activities.

The North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) was enacted in 1989 and provides matching grants to private organizations and public agencies to accomplish wetland conservation projects in the United States, Canada, and Mexico. Congress allocates Federal tax dollars to fund the NAWCA program. In turn, applicants apply for NAWCA grants to put towards wetland conservation projects. Through the application process, successful grant recipients match the grant amounts received at ratios of 1:1 or 2:1. Region 6 received \$1,275,010 in NAWCA grants, which accounted for 7% of the Region's acquisition funding in 2006. The final portion of the Region's funding came from invaluable partnerships and generous donations accounting for \$4,521,083 which was 26% of the Realty Division's total land acquisition budget.

Conservation in the Making

In cooperation with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), the Service is working to transfer BLM administered lands that lie within the approved boundary of Cokeville Meadows NWR to the Service. As part of this transaction, the Service will transfer Service administered lands located outside of the Cokeville Meadows NWR boundary to BLM. The mutually beneficial transfer of these lands will result in more efficient management capabilities by both agencies.

Currently, the Service and Commerce City, Colorado, are in the process of a land exchange which will result in the transfer of 150 acres to the Service and 40 acres to Commerce City. The land owned by Commerce City is adjacent to a major roadway bordering the west side of the Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR. The proposal for the exchange has been sent to the Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, for signature and approval. Once approved by

the Director, the proposed land exchange will go before the Senate appropriations committee for approval. This exchange will result in a donated land value of \$113,400 from Commerce City to the Service.

Currently, the Service, the National Park Service, and the BLM are working with the State of Colorado on a large-scale land exchange that will transfer approximately 51,000 acres of state-owned land located within Baca NWR and Great Sand Dunes National Park to the United States in exchange for approximately 23,000 acres of BLM managed land. The exchange will consolidate State-owned lands and simplify management for both the State and Federal agencies. The accomplishment of this land transfer is targeted for completion sometime in 2007.



Tree Sparrow; Huron WMD
USFWS



Thrush, Pierre; South Dakota
Kent N. Olsen / USFWS



Cokeville Meadows NWR / USFWS



Moose wading in a Montana wetland. / USFWS

New & Additional Refuge Lands

On September 19, 2006, the Service acquired the first conservation easement within the Rocky Mountain Front Conservation Area. The 4,230 acres preserved by this conservation easement is a great start toward reaching the larger project goal of protecting 170,000 acres of habitat along the eastern front of the Rocky Mountains in Montana. Within the protected area, there lies nearly 3 miles of riparian habitat along the Middle Fork of the Dearborn River which provides excellent habitat for

grizzly bears and numerous migratory birds. The Rocky Mountain Front’s native plant and animal populations are generally intact due to sparse settlement and an economy based principally on ranching. Economically viable ranching operations have been a key factor in maintaining the biological diversity of the area.

Also in Montana, The Conservation Fund (TCF), a valued conservation partner, assisted in the preservation of 680 acres within the Charles M.

Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR

During World War II, the Rocky Mountain Arsenal, located adjacent to Commerce City, Colorado, produced chemical munitions and other munitions as weaponry for the war. In 1992, Congress mandated that the area be rehabilitated and turned over to the Service to create what is now known as the Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR. Over the last 14 years, the Service has partnered with the Department of Defense and Shell Oil Company to clean up and restore wildlife habitat at the Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR. Thus far, the clean up has been completed in phases. This year, 7,258 acres were transferred from the Department of Defense’s

primary control to the Department of the Interior to be administered by the Service, at a ceremony attended by the Secretary of the Department of the Interior, Dirk Kempthorne, and the Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Army, Tad Davis. Upon completion of the clean up scheduled for 2011, Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR will total over 15,000 acres of protected habitat adjacent to Denver, one of the nation’s larger metropolitan areas. Native grasses, such as blue gamma and buffalo grass, which have been absent from the landscape for nearly 60 years, are replacing noxious weeds and grasses, restoring this area to the rich plant diversity that existed prior to the war.

**U.S. Department of the Interior
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Region 6, NWRS, Division of Realty
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January 2007



Russell NWR by purchasing and holding the property until such time as the Service could secure funding to acquire the property. During this fiscal year, the funding became available and the Service was able to purchase the property from TCF for \$272,000. Through this acquisition, the Service protected native grasslands that provide excellent habitat for pronghorn antelope and sharp-tailed grouse, the two primary species for which Charles M. Russell NWR was established.



Secretary Kempthorne and Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Army Tad Davis sign documents transferring 7,258 acres of land from the Army to the Service.