

# 2008 Annual Report

## *Division of Realty Mountain-Prairie Region*



Huron WMD / USFWS

### The Small Wetlands Acquisition Program Celebrated Its 50th Anniversary, and the Federal Duck Stamp is Now 75!

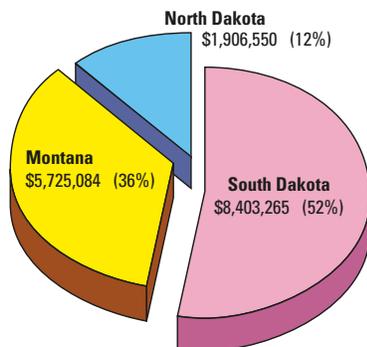
The Service celebrated the 50th anniversary of its Small Wetlands Acquisition Program in 2008. Since 1958, the Service has successfully conserved nearly 3 million acres of wetlands and grasslands in the Prairie Pothole Region of the upper Midwestern United States through the Small Wetlands Acquisition Program, with tremendous benefits to migratory birds, wildlife, and the environment. By raising awareness of this vital program and increasing public understanding and support, we hope to continue our proud legacy of conserving this critical prairie habitat into the future.

Celebrating its 75th year, the Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamps, commonly known as the “Duck Stamp,” was originally created in 1934 as the federal license required for hunting migratory waterfowl. Since then, Duck Stamps have generated more than \$700 million, which has been used to help purchase or lease over 5.2 million acres of waterfowl habitat as part of the National Wildlife Refuge System. Each year, almost 25% of the Duck Stamp fund, also known as the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund (MBCF), goes to Region 6 to acquire vital habitat for waterfowl and other species.

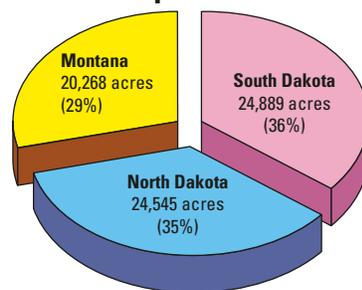
### Habitat Highlights

In 2008, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), Mountain-Prairie Region (also known as Region 6), Division of Realty, protected 69,702 acres of land as additions to the National Wildlife Refuge System. Realty staff located in Colorado, Montana, North Dakota, and South Dakota worked together to preserve numerous types of habitat through fee and easement acquisitions. The majority of the land acquisitions were wetland and grassland easements located in North Dakota and South Dakota, with additional habitat being acquired as conservation easements in Montana.

### Habitat Cost



### Habitat Acquired





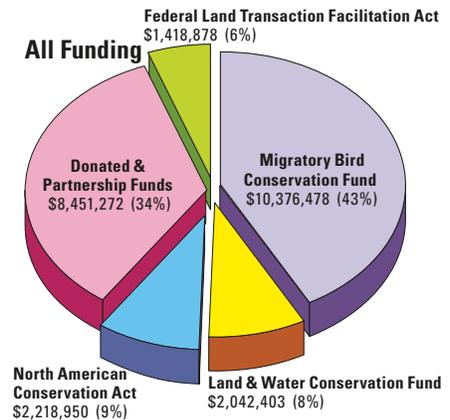
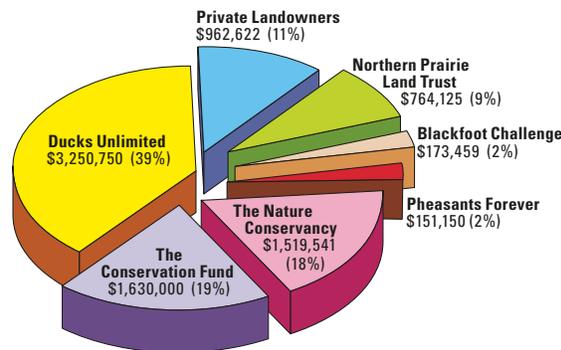
Chase Lake WMD / USFWS

### The Fish and Wildlife Service Expendes One Billionth Dollar from the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund

In 2008, the Service announced the one billionth dollar spent from MBCF was used to complete the purchase of a perpetual grassland easement on private land in Campbell County, South Dakota. The easement was acquired through the Small Wetlands Acquisition Program, which is the agency's premier program working to acquire and protect vital wetlands and grasslands to sustain and enhance migratory bird populations. To date, the Service has used MBCF

to place over 1.3 million acres of migratory bird habitat in South Dakota under the protection of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

#### Financial Contributions from Partners



Red Rock Lakes NWR / USFWS

### Phased Acquisition Works

In Montana, the Service continued to work closely with The Nature Conservancy (TNC) on the second phase of a multi-year acquisition project to acquire the single, largest

remaining inholding (Murphy Creek Ranch) within Red Rock Lakes NWR. The Murphy Creek Ranch along the northern boundary of the Refuge was purchased by TNC with

the eventual goal of adding 7,574 acres (4,308 acres in fee and 3,266 acres of State lease lands) to the Refuge. Phase two involved the fee purchase of an additional 2,075 acres from TNC using a combination of funding sources including \$996,736 from MBCF, \$950,000 from a North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) grant, and \$1,418,878 from the Federal Land Transaction Facilitation Act (FLTFA) that was provided by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). An additional 3,266 acres of lease lands from the State of Montana were transferred to the Service as part of the project. The Service hopes to acquire the remaining balance of 949 acres from TNC in the near future.

## Largest Conservation Easement Acquired in 2008

The Service continues to protect important fish and wildlife habitat on private land as part of the Rocky Mountain Front Conservation Area in north-central Montana. The single largest conservation easement (12,130 acres) for the National Wildlife Refuge System in the lower 48 states was acquired along the eastern edge of the 16,000 acre tract of land known as The Nature Conservancy Pine Butte Swamp Preserve. The easement tract includes over 2,000 acres of extensive wetland and riparian habitat along the Teton River property, which provides some of the best grizzly bear habitat in the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem.



*Rocky Mountain Front Conservation Area / USFWS*

In addition, nearly 8,000 acres of native prairie will be protected, providing essential habitat for numerous grassland birds, many of which are experiencing significant

population declines. This effort would not have been possible without the generous donations of significant funding from TNC, The Conservation Fund, and the landowner.



*J. Clark Salyer NWR / USFWS*

## Ducks Unlimited and the Small Wetlands Acquisition Program

The Small Wetlands Acquisition Program continues to be the cornerstone of Region 6's land acquisition program. Ducks Unlimited (DU) remains instrumental in this effort, having provided over \$18,850,075 to the Services' habitat protection program across the Prairie Pothole Region during the past 11 years. In 2008, DU donated 27 wetland and grassland easements to protect 16,123.51 acres in North and South

Dakota at a value of \$3,250,075. The Service greatly appreciates this long-term partnership and the generous contributions of DU, the nation's leading wetland conservation organization.

### ***Rescue the Duck Factory Initiative Hits the Ground Running***

DU has recently launched a new campaign, *Rescue the Duck Factory*, to help leverage financial resources in the Prairie Pothole

Regions of North Dakota and South Dakota. This landscape of high density small wetlands and large tracts of abundant grasslands is responsible for producing a large percentage of the continental waterfowl population (i.e. the Duck Factory). In the last several years, the rate of conversion of the remaining grasslands to cropland has markedly increased.

*Rescue the Duck Factory* is an initiative by DU in cooperation with the Service's perpetual grassland easement program. A grassland easement protects the grassland from being converted to cropland thereby maintaining vital breeding habitat necessary not only for waterfowl, but also for a varied array of grassland and wetland dependent wildlife populations. Grazing the grassland is not restricted by the easement, so landowners still maintain the ability to receive an income off their property. Through private donor gifts to *Rescue the Duck Factory*, funds will be utilized to purchase perpetual grassland easements from a backlog of 650 willing sellers.



Arapaho NWR / USFWS

**On the Horizon**

***Service Bequeathed Property***

In 2008, a Jackson County, Colorado resident passed away and bequeathed her ranch property consisting of over 2,200 acres to the United States for inclusion in Arapaho NWR. The property is adjacent to existing federal lands at Sentinel Mountain that are managed by BLM, some of which may also become part of the Refuge.

***Refuge's Win with Partnerships***

The Service is working in partnership with the Western Rivers Conservancy and Ducks Unlimited to acquire approximately 700 acres at Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge. The property features large wetlands, marshland, and riparian areas that will benefit migratory birds and shorebirds. Water rights included in the proposed transfer are important to the management of existing refuge lands. The Refuge is host to over 250 species of birds as they stop to rest and feed during their migration and/or nesting season.



Baca NWR / USFWS

***Baca NWR Land Exchange Takes Time and Coordination***

The Service is working with BLM, the Colorado State Land Board, and the National Park Service on a proposed land exchange that will transfer over 57,000 acres of State lands and minerals to the United States. About half of the State lands involved lie within the approved acquisition boundary of Baca National Wildlife Refuge. The agencies have been working on the proposal for several years and expect to complete the transaction in 2009.

**South Dakota Wetland District Manager is the Recipient of the 2008 Land Legacy Award**

Madison Wetland Management District Manager Tom Tornow received the 2008 Land Legacy Award. Tom has been instrumental in the creation of the Harvey Dunn Grassland Preservation Project (Project) with a goal to perpetually protect 24,000 acres of prairie in eastern South Dakota. The Project has received National Wildlife Federation and NAWCA grants totaling \$2.8 million. Tom has worked with various wildlife groups and organizations to secure the donations needed to obtain the matching grants, doubling the amount of land that can be protected. The Service acquired 1,519 acres valued at \$764,125 with the funding from the Project. To generate funds for this Project, the family of artist Harvey Dunn

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**January 2009**



*Tom Tornow with his 2008 Land Legacy Award / USFWS*

agreed to donate proceeds from the sale of prints of one of his original oil paintings. The painting titled "The Prairie Trail," had never before been published and is available exclusively through the Harvey Dunn Grassland Preservation Project.