

VALENTINE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Valentine, Nebraska

Annual Narrative Report

Calendar Year 2000

## **INTRODUCTION**

Valentine National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) was established on August 4, 1935 under the Migratory Bird Conservation Act by Executive Order 7142. The purpose of the refuge as stated in the executive order is “as a refuge and breeding ground for migratory birds and other wildlife.”

Acquisition funding came from Duck Stamp sales and the Emergency Conservation Fund Of 1933.

The 71,272-acre Valentine NWR is located in the Sandhills of north-central Nebraska. The Sandhills contain the largest remaining stands of mid and tall grass native prairie left in North America. The refuge is a unique and ecologically important component of the National Wildlife Refuge System. The refuge has about 49,000 acres of grassy, undulating sand dunes, 13,000 acres of sub-irrigated meadows, and 10,000 acres of shallow lakes and marshes. The refuge is home to 270 species of birds, 59 species of mammals, and 22 species of reptiles and amphibians. The refuge is important to nesting and migrating waterfowl and is also one of the few places where good numbers of sharp-tailed grouse and prairie chickens can be found in the same area.. Several threatened or endangered birds stop at the refuge during migration. Two listed plants and one listed insect are also found here. Most of the native flora and fauna found here historically are still present today.

The refuge is part of a complex administered from Fort Niobrara NWR. Valentine NWR is in Cherry County with a sub-headquarters located on Hackberry Lake, 17 miles south of the town of Valentine on US 83 then 13 miles west on State Spur 16B.

### **A. Highlights**

In September 5 wildfires burned about 1/3 of the refuge grasslands.

Ducks Unlimited repaired the dike and put in a water control structure at Calf Camp Marsh.

An observation deck was built on the fire tower at Hackberry Lake.

### **C. Land Acquisition**

#### **1. Land Acquisition**

The boundary of the land acquired in the Colburn exchange was surveyed and revealed that the fence around the property is not on the boundary line. Two of the three neighbors oppose moving the fence to the line even if we pay for the fencing.

## **D. Planning**

### 1. Master Plan

### 4. Compliance with Environmental and Cultural Resource Mandates

At our request the Nebraska Department of Roads completed an environmental assessment, programmatic section 4(f) evaluation, and biological opinion for improvements of parts of US Highway 83 through Valentine NWR. Mitigation and planning measures included in the EA include; building on existing alignment rather than adjacent and abandoning the old, construction of barrier fences to reduce road kill of Blandings turtles, purchase of 60 acres of land to replace that taken in the enlarged right of way, wetland restoration at Marsh Lakes, and narrowing the right of way at Sweetwater Valley to protect prairie-white fringed orchids.

## **E. Administration**

### 1. Personnel

#### Permanent Staff

Asst Refuge Manger Mark Lindvall GS-11

Biologist Len McDaniel GS-11

Maintenance Worker Dave Kime WG 8

Bridgette Flanders, Student Career Experience Program GS 5

Bridgette Flanders started as a SCEP trainee this year. She is a masters candidate at Colorado State University under Dr. Gary White. She worked primarily with the refuge biologist on the effects of vegetation and weather on grouse populations at Valentine NWR. She is using historical refuge weather, grazing, and grouse records to do her thesis work.

### 8. Other

Asst. Manger Lindvall attended a grant writing workshop held in Scottsbluff, NE on August 28 and 29.

**F. Habitat Management**

7. Grazing

2000 HABITAT MANAGEMENT SUMMARY

<u>treatment</u>	<u>units</u>	<u>acres</u>	<u>AUMs</u>
rest R	141	24,167	
spring			
spring grazing treatment SGT	29	3,674	1,344
early spring short duration			
ES-SD 1-6 days	6	1,229	248
ES-SD-6-9 days	3	1,421	233
summer			
short duration summer			
SD-S 1-3 days	21	2,945	561
SD-S 4-7 days	30	9,646	1,445
SD-S 8-15 days	4	2,160	408
summer S 15-27 days	0	-	-
fall F or F-H	7	1,721	716
winter W or FD-L	5	1,557	1,195
hayed H	17	731	-
gov't horse	1	20	12
prescribed fire P	3		419
natural fire N	95	18,292	

\*\*note that acres when totaled exceeds the approximately 61,661 acres of upland on the refuge

due to double treatment of some units. This is the case for many of the areas that burned in the fall of the year that were grazed earlier in the year. The natural fire acres are from the survey done using a helicopter and GPS, not from the total from the databases

## H. Public Use

### 1. General

A tour was provided for the 4 H sponsored Sandhills Academy. The group spends about a week learning about the economy, conservation, and ecology of the Sandhills of Nebraska.

A dedication of the Civilian Conservation Corps Tower Trail and Observation Deck was held on September 10. About 60 people attended the event including 4 men who had worked with the CCC at Valentine NWR. Speakers for the event were County Commissioner Jim Van Winkle, local newspaper columnist and historian Marianne Beel, CCC Corpsman, and the a son of the late Francis Crowe.. History Association attending. The Francis E. Crowe, neighbor, rancher, refuge during tower. Francis's cutting at the tower

An article on the in the Fish and



The Fort Niobrara Natural hosted a free barbeque for all tower was dedicated in honor of 1914-2000 who was a refuge and CCC Corpsman at the construction of the original wife Carol did the ribbon site.

deck was written and appeared Wildlife Service News.



An observation deck was built on the old fire tower at Hackberry Lake.

Four men who were Corpsmen for the CCC at Valentine NWR showed up for the dedication of the observation deck.

1. Wildlife Observation

Blinds for observing prairie chickens and sharptails were placed at Valentine NWR.

17. Law Enforcement

Refuge Officers Lindvall and Kime attended the annual refreshers held in Marrana, AZ as well as the Nebraska refresher held in August.

Refuge Office Lindvall worked a LE detail at the Rainwater Basin WMD during the spring snow goose season.

In May we did a game check of fishermen exiting the refuge. Compliance with the refuge size limits on fish was good.

## **I. Equipment and Facilities**

### **1. New Construction**

An observation deck was built within the legs of the existing fire observation tower located on the west end of Hackberry Lake. The deck was designed by an engineer in the Regional Office. The deck is about 30 feet off the ground. The deck was built by a local contractor with MMS funds of \$36,500. One flight of stairs going from the deck on up was removed so that visitors would not continue up the tower. A grant was used to purchase a viewing scope that was placed on the deck. Signs were placed at the trail head leading to the deck. The view from the deck is quite spectacular. The trail and deck were named the CCC Nature Trail and Observation Deck in honor of the corpsman who built the original tower.

### **2. Rehabilitation**

A funding proposal for Calf Camp Dike was submitted to Ducks Unlimited and subsequently funded for approximately \$40,000. DU completed repairs to the Calf Camp Dike including; replacing 2 culverts with a drop log water control structure, adding dirt to the dike, placing of erosion control mat, and placing of rock rip rap on both the up and down stream sides. We obtained the needed permits including a permit to impound 90 acre feet of water. The old culverts and dike were badly eroded and offered no chance for manipulating water levels. The response of vegetation and bird use was dramatic following the draw down and re-flooding. What was basically a sterile lake became a nice marsh that attracted thousands of ducks, geese, and shorebirds. DU was a joy to work with. They did the survey, engineering, contracting, and job inspections.

## **J. Other Items**

### **3. Credits**

Refuge Manger Lindvall wrote all sections of this report in 2003. Information from refuge files was used to the extent possible. Unfortunately no monthly activity reports were done in 2000 so much information is missing.