

Committee Reports 2023

2023
Committee Reports

Private Lands

Public Lands

Deer & Wild Turkey

Furbearer

Wildlife Diversity

Climate Change

CITES

Feral Swine

Conservation Social Science/Human Dimensions

Law Enforcement (AMFGLEO)

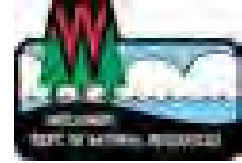
Fish & Wildlife Health

R3 & Relevancy

Chronic Wasting Disease Ad Hoc

Private Lands, Public Lands, Wildlife Diversity
and Midwest Landscape Initiative Report

Private Lands



2023 MAFWA Private Lands Working Group Directors Report

Submitted by: Haley Frater, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Wildlife Management

Meeting Time and Place

The 2023 MAFWA Private Lands Working Group Meeting was held May 9-11, 2023 at the Wilderness Resort in Wisconsin Dells, WI. The meeting ran from 7:30 am on the 9th to 2:30 pm on the 11th.

Attendance

20 representatives from 11 of the 13 MAFWA states were in attendance, see Appendix 1. Additionally, Kalina Vatave, AFWA Ag Policy Program Manager; Scott Taylor, National Pheasant Plan Coordinator; and Ian Krauss, NRCS Ag Program Specialist, participated as presenters.

Executive Summary

The 2023 Private Lands Working Group Committee Meeting focused on identifying program successes, struggles, and desired future direction as well as receiving updates on federal farm bill funding, Appendix 2. To facilitate these conversations, each state provided an update which identified their structure, goals, successes, struggles, and future direction, Appendix 3. Additionally, we had a facilitated group discussion on the topic. **Major themes of this conversation included the continued and pervasive struggles with recruitment (quantity and quality of applications) as well as training and retaining staff.** Finally, Kalina Vatave provided an AFWA update, Ian Krauss an NRCS update, and Scott Taylor a Pheasant Forever update.

In addition to our committee meeting conversations, we also participated in facilitated, multi-committee conversations on landscape-scale projects, Appendix 4. These conversations highlighted the extent of many of our issues as well as the desire to collaborate across state lines, see Joint Meeting Summary and Report Out.

Director Action Items

To address the struggles identified during our committee meeting, we present three action items for your consideration: a MAFWA job board, a centralized training program, and wetland engineer and technician shortages.

May 26, 2023
MAFWA Directors

Dear MAFWA Directors,

Recruitment and retention of the next generation of wildlife conservationists has become a high priority for all the MAFWA states. Declines in the number of applicants for our developmental LTE positions has sparked concern, resulting in several states tasking teams to investigate the issue and develop potential solutions. The potential reasons for this decline (salary, housing, societal trends, etc.) are dynamic and complex. However, we have identified one specific issue that we feel we can influence now. We would like to propose a solution to the question of whether prospective applicants are finding the opportunities that we are offering. Simply put, are they seeing the job announcements for the positions that we have available?

Iowa DNR recently conducted a survey of students from colleges and universities across the state. One of the questions within the survey looked at the above question with interesting results. 73% of respondents indicated that they looked at the Iowa DNR website for opportunities; 65% receive job announcements from their college or university job boards and/or their professors; and only 39% of respondents looked to the Texas A&M job board. This was a surprise, as Texas A&M job board has long been the standard for advertising conservation positions. Additionally, for Iowa at least, contracted LTE positions are not posted to the DNR website.

In conclusion, we feel as though improvements could be made to increase the visibility and awareness of the opportunities that the MAFWA states have for prospective applicants. We ask that the Directors work to develop and support a MAFWA region job board, where MAFWA states can advertise our positions. We believe that condensing the scope of job announcements to those of the region will increase awareness and increase recruitment. To further develop this concept, Nick Baumgarten (Iowa DNR Private Lands Coordinator) and Anne Reis-Boyle (Wisconsin DNR Public Lands Specialist) offer their assistance.

Sincerely,
MAFWA Private & Public Land Working Groups

Represented here by:

Nick Baumgarten (Iowa Department of Natural Resources), 712-330-6932,
nick.baumgarten@dnr.iowa.gov

Anne Reis-Boyle (Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources), 608-279-6483,
anne.reis@wisconsin.gov

May 26, 2023

MAFWA Directors

Dear MAFWA Directors,

Private land biologist recruitment and retention are common challenges faced by the majority, if not all, of the MAFWA State Fish and Wildlife Agencies. When a state is successful in hiring a new private land biologist, the new hires are often recent college graduates with limited hands-on knowledge or experience with land management implementation or working directly with private landowners. Additionally, state agencies are often challenged with providing the extensive training needed to new staff in a timely manner due to existing capacity limitations.

The MAFWA Private Land Working Group recommends MAFWA and the member states submit a multi-state funding proposal to develop a “MAFWA Private Land Delivery and Implementation Training course” designed for new private land biologists hired by MAFWA member state agencies. The training curriculum will be based on the ‘Private Land Biologist Training Framework’ currently under development by the AFWA Ag Conservation Committee’s Private Land Working Group. The training framework will incorporate recommended training topics ranging from how to develop positive and trusting relationships with private landowners to hands-on management implementation skills (e.g., calibrating drills and herbicide sprayers, how to create edge feathering or quail covey headquarters, etc.). The training course will be formatted using a ‘training-camp’ approach where member states can send new employees for multi-day/week training opportunities organized multiple times per year (or as needed) across the MAFWA region. It is also recommended the proposal include funds to support hiring a part-time training coordinator to assist in development and coordination of the training courses.

Creating one MAFWA private land training program will help alleviate the need for each state to develop duplicative individual training programs. A MAFWA course can teach best management practices for the implementation of private land conservation to all private land staff across the MAFWA membership which will help ensure consistent and high-quality delivery of private land conservation across the region.

Sincerely,

MAFWA Private Land Working Group

Represented here by:

Lisa Potter (Missouri Department of Conservation), (573) 522-4115 x. 3142,

Lisa.Potter@mdc.mo.gov

John Kaiser (Ohio Department of Natural Resources), (937) 203-7511,

John.Kaiser@dnr.ohio.gov

Nick Baumgarten (Iowa Department of Natural Resources), (712) 330-6932,

Nick.Baumgarten@dnr.iowa.gov

May 26, 2023

MAFWA Directors

Dear MAFWA Directors,

At the recent combined MAFWA public lands, private lands, diversity and MLI meeting in Wisconsin, attendees had discussions about wetlands and needs related to getting conservation done on them. Wetlands are a very important part of the MAFWA states' landscapes and there is clearly a need and desire to increase wetland protection, management, and restoration across the region.

The most obvious and pressing need that emerged was the need for more engineers and engineering technicians. Each state has been struggling to get WRE, CRP/CREP, and other wetland projects completed in a timely fashion due to the lack of engineers available to design the wetland projects. USDA has engineers, but not enough of them, and Conservation Partners, such as Ducks Unlimited (DU), are adding them. Additionally, engineers with stream and wetland expertise are especially difficult to find and retain. This problem is likely to get worse as we focus more work on small streams and wetlands which increases the need for engineers and support staff.

We recommend the Directors reach out to their respective NRCS State Conservationist to express concerns about the lack of USDA staff capacity for implementing the WRE program, particularly the lack of available engineers and engineering technicians. Additionally, we recommend the Directors proactively discuss partnership funding opportunities between USDA, state fish and wildlife agencies, and NGOs to cooperatively fund additional engineers and engineering technicians at salary ranges that are competitive with private industry. Salaries that are commensurate with private industry are needed to attract engineers to the conservation field.

For efficiency, the additional partnership positions could be housed with conservation partners (e.g., Ducks Unlimited (DU) or others as appropriate) which would make it easier for the positions to work across state lines (for example, in Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas and Missouri along the Missouri River). This suggested solution was also discussed at the WRE Summit DU sponsored in Memphis, TN last November and they will be holding a virtual meeting to continue discussions on June 12, 2023.

Ultimately, working together to hire additional wetland staff capacity would allow the conservation community to get many more wetland contracts and easements completed, more acres of wetlands restored and better migration and breeding habitat for our waterfowl, shorebirds and countless other wildlife species as well. More wetlands could also help to improve water quality, including hypoxia issues, reduce flooding impacts, recharge groundwater, and sequester carbon. We could attempt to "fix this" across the entire MAFWA region, or we could divide this down to different areas such as the Ohio River valley, the Mississippi River valley, the Missouri River Valley, the Great Lakes region and the potholes and playas region.

All MAFWA states have financial needs for wetland restoration, management, and enhancement to go along with stream restoration, infrastructure development, and/or infrastructure removal. In addition to funding available through the “IRA” or the “BIL”, administered directly through USDA programs, we recommend the Directors task agency Farm Bill Coordinators or other program staff to actively seek additional wetland restoration funding opportunities through programs such as America the Beautiful Challenge grants, NAWCA and other grant sources as well.

As a very rough financial estimate, we would like to pursue \$1.5 million/year of funding to add 10 engineers (or other engineer technicians or easement acquisition services staffing as needed to meet state specific staffing deficiencies) across the MAFWA. Additionally, we would like to pursue \$8.5 million/year for additional wetland restoration and enhancement work. This would amount to \$50 million over a five-year period to improve wetland conservation and related processes.

Any of the grants or projects funded would tie directly to, be driven by, and in turn support NAWMP, Migratory Bird Plans (by Joint Ventures), Flyway Plans, the MLI and the SWAPs of any state involved.

We would greatly appreciate the support of our MAFWA Directors in taking this message and effort to their local USDA partners.

Sincerely,

MAFWA public/private/diversity/MLI staff

Represented here by:

T. J. Walker (Nebraska Game and Parks Commission), (308) 530-7659,
thomas.walker@nebraska.gov

Lisa Potter (Missouri Department of Conservation), (573) 819-9024, Lisa.Potter@mdc.mo.gov

John Kaiser (Ohio Department of Natural Resources), (937) 203-7511,
John.Kaiser@dnr.ohio.gov

Director Information Items

Program Success, Struggles, and Future Directions – Discussion Summaries

Program Successes Summary

The strong foundation of a “successful” private lands program is braced by the pillars of ***Support, Relationships, Communication, Funding, and Flexibility***. Support from agency administration/leadership, conservation partners, stakeholder groups, and the general public are imperative to getting private lands programs off the ground. While the long-term success of a program is dependent on its ability to foster relationships with private landowner through one-on-one interactions. Good communication with private landowners, conservation partners, and local public land managers is key to maintaining consistency and supporting partner relationships. Available funding to support both private lands staff (capacity building) and landowners (financial assistance) greatly increases program longevity and the likelihood of habitat management implementation. While incorporating flexibility allows staff to pilot new approaches, adapt to landowner interest, and adjust to fluctuating staffing/funding levels all of which are pivotal to maintaining program success.

Program Struggles Summary

The biggest struggle for our private lands programs was the recruitment and retention of staff. The lack of adequate applicant pools and constant turnover make it hard to have a consistent, high producing, and effective program. Another struggle was working with NGOs, NRCS, and FWS cost share programs due to their constant changes (application deadlines, criteria, who is administering the programs, etc.) making it difficult to point private landowners in the right direction. On that same note, it takes time to do the work and in many cases the grant periods are too short causing the private landowner to have to reapply causing confusion and frustration. The discrepancy between funding and the staff to administer projects was also a commonly identified struggle. Currently there is more funding available than staff to administer it, leaving big dollars un-used. Another common struggle was the lack of available/qualified contractors. This seemed to be a product of lack of availability, i.e., not enough contractors, and an unwillingness to work on agency projects (too many hoops to jump through, long time to pay-out).

Future Direction Summary

Five major characteristics were identified as desired pillars to developing or enhancing private lands programs: ***proper funding and resource allocation, flexibility, efficiency, collaborative communication, and engaged landowners***. The ideal private lands program would have robust and consistent funding paired with the staff capacity to meet demand, increase participation, and spend time with individual landowners. Additionally, the program would be flexible and simple enough to adapt to landowner desires/goals across a wide variety of landscapes while keeping funding requirements simple and understandable. To increase management implementation, programs need to be efficient and streamlined to ease the processes associated with hiring contractors and making payments. To efficiently and accurately direct private landowners to the proper resources, our programs need to be able to collaborate across boundaries and organizations. Not only would this enable us to better serve our members, but it would facilitate information sharing across programs. Finally, and potentially most importantly, our programs need landowners who are as invested as we are. Our programs should be a “partnership” between landowner and agencies. Thus, the programs need to have a strong social science component,

opportunities for members to regularly provide feedback, and have required reporting by program participants.

Farm Bill Updates – Presentation Summaries

AFWA

There are two major spheres of discussion in DC right now revolving around agriculture and private lands - the 2023 Farm Bill and the Inflation Reduction Act. The Farm Bill reauthorization process is well underway, with the Senate hoping to have a draft bill early this summer, and the House looking at the end of summer or early fall. In terms of timing, it is unlikely the September deadline will be met, but staffers are still hopeful that things will move quickly to reauthorize the bill by the end of the calendar year. As more marker bills are introduced, Kalina will be reaching out to states on behalf of AFWA to solicit support. States are also encouraged to get their delegation out in the field to see how these programs work on the ground and benefit fish and wildlife. The Inflation Reduction Act is bringing waves of money to the agriculture space. This first year (FY 23), funds have been targeted for ACEP, but EQIP and CSP rollout has been on-time so far. The recent RCPP announcement includes both regular and IRA funds. The NRCS is encouraging partners to think big, supported by the change to a \$20 Million cap in project spending.

NRCS

The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) presentation gave a high-level overview of the program and role of partners and partner organizations. Starting with a brief history on CRP, the presentation went into how CRP changed since its first signup in 1986 to current enrollment today, and the most common signups and practices. It continued into a brief overview of producer eligibility (Ownership and Crop History) and of each signup type: General, Grassland, and Continuous – including Continuous sub-signups (HELI, SAFE, CLEAR30, and CREP). Focus was made on the producer maintenance requirements and incentives: annual rental payment, signup incentive bonus, 50% cost share, and practice incentive bonus. The goal was to give partners a general understanding of how CRP fits into the conservation landscape and provide talking points when working with private landowners to encourage CRP participation.

Pheasants Forever

The National Wild Pheasant Conservation Plan and Partnerships is currently supported by Pheasants Forever and 18 state wildlife agencies, including every MAFWA state with a wild pheasant population. The partnership revised the National Plan in 2021, and therein directed the Plan Coordinator to develop a state-based decision support tool providing return-on-investment analyses of pheasant responses to habitat change. Scott presented a draft of the tool that maps areas within a state providing the greatest predicted change in pheasant abundance per CRP acre or dollar invested and tabulates the predicted statewide change in pheasant abundance from current values should that optimization of CRP resources be adopted. Scott welcomed comments on the tool and will share its web address with the working group after some additional edits are completed.

Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held in May of 2024 in Illinois.

Appendices

Appendix 1. Attendance List

Organization	Participant
AFWA	Kalina Vatave
Illinois Department of Natural Resources	Don Kahl
Indiana Department of Natural Resources	Sam Whiteleather
Iowa Department of Natural Resources	Nick Baumgarten
Iowa Department of Natural Resources	Todd Bogenschultz
Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks, and Tourism	Wes Sowards
Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources	Jacob Stewart
Michigan Department of Natural Resources	Kenneth Kesson
Missouri Department of Conservation	Lisa Potter
Nebraska Game and Parks Commission	Jenny Prenosil
Nebraska Game and Parks Commission	T.J. Walker
Nebraska Game and Parks Commission	Isaac Young
North Dakota Game and Fish Department	Andrew Ahrens
North Dakota Game and Fish Department	Bill Hasse
Ohio Department of Natural Resources	John Kaiser
Pheasants Forever	Marty Moses
Pheasants Forever	Scott Taylor
USDA NRCS	Ian Krauss
Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources	Mary C Anderson
Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources	Eric Canania
Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources	Matt Esser
Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources	Ethan Graves
Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources	Haley Frater
Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources	Zak Knab



MAFWA PRIVATE LANDS WORKING GROUP COMMITTEE MEETING

May 9, 2023 | Wilderness Resort | Wisconsin Dells, WI

MEETING PURPOSE: *Discuss shared issues and opportunities affecting private lands and suggest action items to the Midwest Association of Fish & Wildlife Agency Directors.*

TENTATIVE AGENDA

12:45-1 Welcome and Logistics

1-2:15 **FARM BILL CONSERVATION PROGRAMS UPDATES**

AFWA

Kalina Vatave, Agriculture Policy Program Manager, AFWA

National Pheasant Plan and Partnerships

Scott Taylor, National Wild Pheasant Conservation Plan Coordinator, Pheasants Forever

NRCS Update

Ian Krauss, Agricultural Program Specialist, USDA

Q&A Session

2:15-2:30 Break

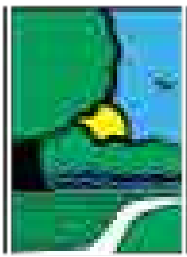
2:30-2:50 **WORLD CAFÉ: SUCCESSES, BARRIERS, AND DESIRES**

2:50-4:30 **STATE UPDATES**

5x5 Format: 5 minutes, 5 slides

1. How does your state structure/approach private lands management?
2. What are your program's goals?
3. Program highlight
4. Program challenge
5. Where do you see private land management in your state heading in the next 5 to 10 years?

4:30-5 **MOVING PRIVATE LAND MANAGEMENT FORWARD DISCUSSION**



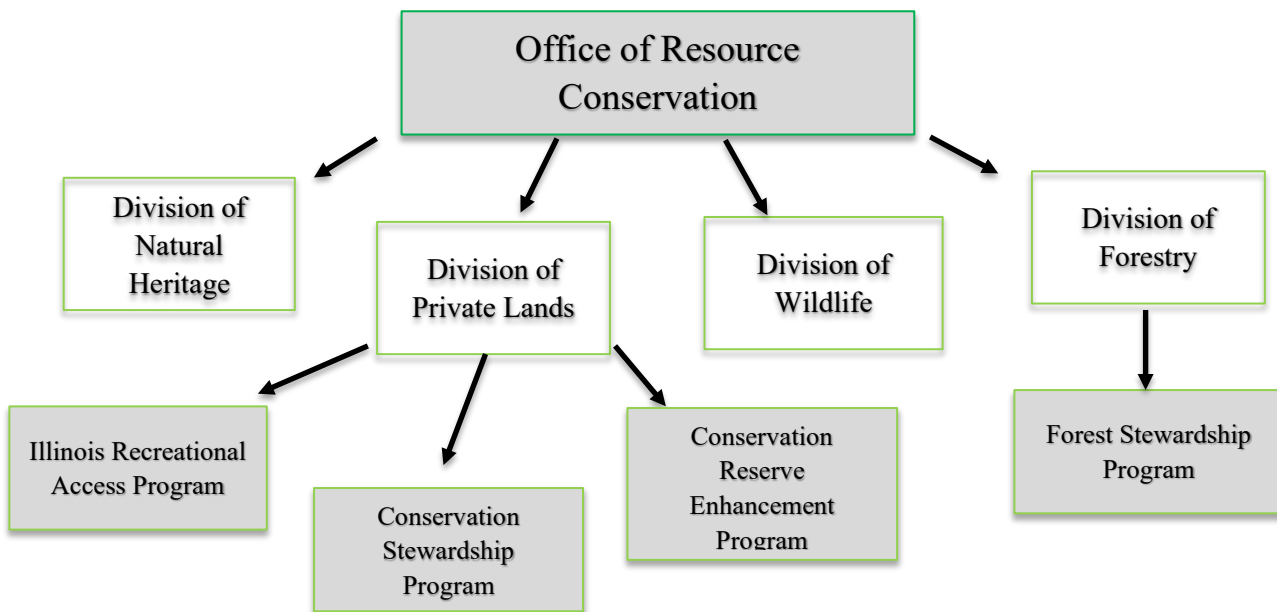
Illinois
Department of
**Natural
Resources**

Illinois Department of Natural Resources, Division
of Private Lands, 1000 East Randolph Street, Springfield, Illinois 62701-1971
www.dnr.illinois.gov

MAFWA Private Lands Report for Spring 2023

Organizational Structure

Under the Office of Resource Conservation of IDNR, 4 Divisions are engaged in private lands work, each with varying degrees of involvement: Wildlife Resources, Natural Heritage, Forestry, and Private Lands. Cumbersome procurement and hiring protocol, coupled with differing levels of budgetary constraints, have made it difficult to grow and expand the Agency’s influence on private lands management.



Wildlife

Once active in private lands management, over the course of the past two decades, Wildlife has redirected its focus to public land management, hunting program administration, and wildlife disease management and surveillance (CWD). Budgetary constraints, declining staffing levels, and the discovery of CWD in northern IL led to the dissolution of Private Lands Biologist positions, with the existing employees being rolled into District Wildlife Biologist positions. Also, the Illinois Acres for Wildlife and Landowner Incentive programs folded. Although rare, when time allows, staff will assist landowners by providing technical guidance, assisting with active management (prescribed fire), and writing management plans. Staff often lead landowners to partners who can better assist their needs. Staff also assist CREP in conducting field reviews for easement applicants.

Currently, our Agriculture and Grassland Habitat Program Manager position, who represents IDNR on the MAFWA Private Lands Working Group, is vacant.

Natural Heritage

District Heritage Biologists focus their attention on state managed sites, which also includes Nature Preserves, Land and Water Reserves, and Natural Heritage Landmarks, and as time allows, staff engage

neighboring landowners and assist them with active management activities when it aligns with the management goals of the state site.

Forestry

District Foresters spend approximately 90% of their time providing private lands assistance. Under the Forestry Assistance Program, staff provide landowners with technical assistance for practices such as woodland inspections and inventories, tree plantings, timber harvest, and tree thinning and pruning. Staff also work in conjunction with the U.S. Forest Service on the Forest Stewardship Program. To date, District Foresters have assisted 9,956 landowners, encompassing 564,454 acres. Forestry is also contracted with the USDA to conduct field reviews on CRP practices that require tree plantings.

Private Lands

Private Lands specifically works with landowners through 3 programs, which includes the Illinois Recreational Access Program (IRAP), the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), and the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP).

IRAP -

- Mostly funded by NRCS' Voluntary Public Access Habitat Incentive Program (VPA-HIP)
- Since IRAP's inception in 2011, over 36,000 acres in over 50 counties have been leased for public hunting and fishing access.
- Private landowners receive a lease payment, a habitat management plan written/updated for leased acres, liability insurance coverage as well as technical and financial assistance with implementing the habitat management plan.
- Nearly 20,000 private acres have been improved through prescribed burning, invasive species removal, timber stand improvement, and prairie/grassland/tree plantings.
- IRAP incorporates R3, giving youth and first time adult hunters preference to access before seasoned hunters.

CSP -

- An IDNR program, not to be confused with USDA's program.
- Landowners receive reduced property tax valuation in exchange for conducting approved land management activities on their enrolled acres
- Common practices include invasive species removal, timber stand improvement, prescribed burning, conservation mowing, and tree planting
- 2571 Enrollments
- 103,134 Enrolled Acres
- Eligible acres consist of Forest, Grassland, Wetland, and Lakes/Ponds

CREP-

In conjunction with USDA's CREP, private landowners receive incentives to enroll land in conservation easements that establish and maintain conservation practices and wildlife habitat on frequently flooded acres and environmentally sensitive cropland within the Illinois and Kaskaskia River watersheds. Staff are currently working through easement applications for the first sign-up that has occurred in the past 7 years. For 2022-23, 6 CREP Technicians are working with Wildlife field staff to review and evaluate 30 easement applicants.



2022 Indiana Private Lands Report

Compiled by Sam Whiteleather

Assistant Division Director, Office of Private Lands

DNR, Division of Fish and Wildlife (DFW)

Submitted 5/5/2023

Continued RCPP Participation

DFW staff were successful in securing RCPP funding for grassland habitat restoration and watershed restoration work. The Grasslands for Gamebirds and Songbirds (GGS) program, funded by NRCS & 23 partners, will continue to receive funding thanks to the renewal of the existing GGS RCPP. The renewal provides \$2.6 million in funding to be used for financial and technical assistance for grassland restoration projects on private lands. The project is projected to restore 3,120 acres of grassland habitat with a targeted environmental outcome of increased occupancy and abundance of Northern Bobwhite Quail, Ring-necked Pheasant, Henslow's Sparrows, and Loggerhead Shrikes. The first phase of this initiative developed 3,848.6 acres of grassland habitat (goal was 3,250 acres) on 297 projects.

DFW staff successfully worked with Indiana Department of Agriculture staff to secure RCPP funding for a watershed initiative in the Kankakee River watershed. The primary goal of the project is to address excess water as a resource concern by developing working lands conservation practices and voluntarily establishing wetlands. DFW staff will help implement the project by assisting with landowner enrollment and providing technical assistance for wildlife-related practices. The project provides \$16 million in total funding for conservation practices. Partner match comes from a broad range of partners including basin development commissions, local non-profits, land trusts, tribal agencies, and agricultural related businesses. Project goals include installing 3,000 acres of new conservation cover, two-miles of two-stage ditches and 800 acres of wetland easements.

CRP Update

As of March 2023, Indiana had 191,785 acres enrolled in CRP with an average rental payment of \$206.51 per acre. Of the 191,785 acres enrolled in CRP, 34,556 acres are enrolled in General CRP while 156,931 acres are enrolled in continuous CRP. Of the continuous CRP acreage, 59,488 acres are enrolled in SAFE (52,326 acres are grassland-based SAFEs), 8,037 acres are enrolled in CP33 (Bobwhite Buffers), 5,903 acres are enrolled in pollinator habitat (CP42), and 580 acres are enrolled in the new Prairie Strips (CP43) practice.

Indiana currently has 4 new SAFE agreements that target Northern Bobwhite Quail, Ring-necked Pheasants, Henslow's Sparrows, and both Indiana and Northern Long-eared Bats. The cumulative acreage goal for these 4 new SAFES equals 130,000 acres with a budget of \$317 Million. The Northern Bobwhite SAFE includes the "first of it's kind" early successional habitat component on CRP lands in

Indiana. This habitat component is grossly under-represented on Indiana's landscape and is a welcome addition to the Northern Bobwhite Quail SAFE.

EQIP Update

In federal fiscal year 2022, Indiana's EQIP-Wildlife pools developed 97 new contracts totaling 3,982 acres of new habitat development with a total expenditure of \$1.972 Million. EQIP expenditures in Indiana met the 10% wildlife target mandate in the 2018 Farm Bill.

Private Lands Access

DFW staff continue to seek new opportunities for hunting access on private lands. By leveraging federal funding secured through both a VPA agreement and the GGS RCPP, DFW was able to open 6,344.4 (4,358.4-RCPP, 1986.0-VPA) acres to public hunting during the 2022 hunting season with a grand total of 16,673.3 acres opened to date. Although the program originally started with game bird properties, staff have built the program to include deer, turkey, waterfowl, and small game hunting opportunities. Hunters rate these opportunities very highly and are appreciative of the high-quality opportunities provided by private landowners. Staff expect to fully utilize existing VPA funding by spring of 2024 which will necessitate the use of alternative funding sources for access payments until the next VPA award cycle. Additional funding sources are being pursued and include seeking contributions from NGOs and other conservation organizations.

Increasing Wildlife Passage

In 2022, DFW staff provided technical and financial assistance for 2 dam removal or modification projects. With new funding sources now available, it is anticipated that many more dams will be removed or modified in coming years.

The DFW environmental permitting team has made great strides in working with the State Department of Transportation to allow greater wildlife passage under bridges and culverts across the state. The team provided technical assistance on 131 bridge and culvert projects that either maintained or improved fish and wildlife passage. By working with project designers to incorporate measures such as benches on sloped banks beneath bridges and improved stream substrate design in culverts, connectivity is restored, and roads are made safer.

Managing Aquatic Invasive Species

DFW continues to look for new opportunities to engage citizens in invasive species management. Staff are currently working to advance new permit language that will allow for increased invasive carp harvest. The permit will expand harvest opportunities to lower carp numbers in Indiana waters. DFW staff assist the Ohio River Basin invasive carp partnership with research, control efforts and evaluation of invasive carps at a regional level.

DFW has also stepped-up measures to increase citizen engagement in stopping the spread of aquatic invasives via boat and trailer transport. By leveraging partners and volunteers, boaters will see an increase in staffing on boat ramps across the state this summer.



Iowa Department of Natural Resources
2021 Private Lands Progress Report to
The Midwest Private Land Wildlife Management Group
May 3, 2022

Vision

Leading in the application of science-based wildlife management on private lands.

Organization

The Wildlife Bureau within the Iowa DNR has three Sections; Research, Public Lands Management, and Private Lands Wildlife Management. The Private Lands Wildlife Management Section is made up of 2 programs, the Wildlife Depredation Program and the Private Lands Program (PLP). The PLP consists of a PLP Coordinator, a Farm Bill Coordinator, 4 Private Lands Biologists (PLB), 4 Wildlife Specialists, 14 Foresters and temporary/partner staff. Currently, the PLP has 13 contract staff; 4 Wetland Easement Team Technicians and 5 Wildlife Specialists (3 Vacant) employed by Conservation Districts of Iowa (CDI) and 4 Forestry Specialists (1 Vacant) positions employed by Wildlife Management Institute (WMI).

The PLP Coordinator works primarily to provide support to PLP staff and District Supervisors, administer and manage budgets, grants, and state-run private lands financial assistance programs, as well provide input on a statewide level to partners involved in activities that affect wildlife habitat on private lands. The PLP Coordinator also serves as the Iowa Habitat and Access Program (IHAP) Coordinator. The FB Coordinator works to provide input on a regional and national level to influence the development and implementation of conservation programs of the Farm Bill. PLB's serve as DNR/NRCS Area Wildlife Biologists and are located in USDA-NRCS Area Offices.

The PLB's provide wildlife training to NRCS staff and serve as a lead worker for individuals considered part of the Iowa DNR's PLP. The PLB's work with the NRCS AC's and DC's to negotiate the location of employees, work with partners to determining workload priorities, provide technical training, and serve as a mentor, and advocate. PLB's seek out funding opportunities to address resource issues within their assigned Area, provide comments on NRCS standards, and conduct experiments to further the benefits of private lands conservation and financial assistance programs. The PLB's also provide one-on-one technical assistance to landowners when necessary. PL field staff work one on one with private landowners to develop wildlife plans and serve as a liaison between the landowner and federal, state, and county programs. They also identify and develop strategies to address priority resource concerns in the area in which they are assigned.

Partners

The partnerships with Conservation Districts of Iowa (CDI) and Wildlife Management Institute (WMI) allows for the employment of 13 additional PLP staff (Biologists and Foresters). The CDI agreement allows for the employment of 4 WET technicians and 5 Wildlife Specialists. The WMI agreement allows for the employment of 4 Forestry Specialists. While the expansion of the PLP staff is an important identified need in the PLP Strategic Plan, state government limits the DNR's ability to hire additional employees. The DNR has entered into a contract with CDI and WMI who have agreed to employ and supervise these 13 PLP members.

The partnership with Pheasants Forever (PF) is a deliverable based agreement where PF's Private Lands Program delivers Habitat Proposals to landowners where they propose wildlife habitat improvements on private lands. This agreement also delivers Wildlife Plans that provide detailed guidance to landowners for the implementation of the chosen recommendations from the Habitat Proposals that the landowners wish to implement.

Funding

The PLP Coordinator and the PLBs are funded with the Iowa Fish and Wildlife Trust Fund exclusively while 4 Wildlife Specialists are funded through the Iowa Fish and Wildlife Trust Fund and PR Federal Funds. USDA funds are used to employ 9 CDI staff (4 WET Techs and 5 Wildlife Specialists). Iowa DNR has an MOA with NRCS to house

these individuals in NRCS offices and provide vehicles. The 4 Forestry Specialists are funded by utilizing competitive funding with USDA and matched with General Fund dollars.

Farm Bill Conservation Programs

Environmental Quality Incentive Program

Iowa has an EQIP Wildlife Sub-account which NRCS funds with 10% of their initial state allocation which is roughly ~3 Million. So far, all funds have been obligated and Iowa NRCS has requested additional funds to cover additional interest. Opportunities to watch include the implementation and hopeful expansion of ACT Now to cover wildlife and forestry related projects. Iowa NRCS piloted ACT Now this past year and it was largely viewed as a success. The streamlined approach of ACT Now creates an opportunity for increased practice adoption on private lands. Additionally, the introduction of IRA funding creates additional opportunities. So far, Iowa NRCS has used IRA funds for Soil Health initiatives. We are hopeful that the practices that will be eligible for IRA funds will be expanded in the coming years. Lastly, a new funding pool was developed and modestly funded for the implementation of WLFW NOBO Initiative. Iowa DNR PLP will assist with the delivery of this initiative.

Conservation Reserve Program

As of March, Iowa has a total of 1,689,101 acres enrolled in CRP. Breaking down this total:

- General CRP 351,306 Acres (~21%)
- CCRP 1,334,016 Acres – Included CREP (~79%)
- Grassland 3,779 Acres (.002%)

Expiring acreages: 2023 – 111,300; 2024 – 74,553; 2025 – 154,056; 2026 – 274,146; and 2027 – 302,905
Roughly 43% of the CRP in Iowa expires between 2025 and 2027.

Summary of Iowa’s CRP Initiatives

Practice	Enrolled
CP23 Wetland Restoration	109,351
CP23A Non-Floodplain	8,880
CP 27/28 Farmable Wetland	91,939
CP42 Pollinator Habitat	226,555
CP 43 Prairie Strips	5,426
SAFE Total	472,741

2022 Private Lands Program Summary

Wildlife Habitat Improvement: Staff developed 486 wildlife plans on 26,820 acres

Forest Improvement: Staff developed 647 forestry plans on 27,724 acres

Recommended Common Practices:

- CRP: 8,500 acres
- Prescribed Burning: 3,000 acres
- WRE/EWP: 9,400 acres

VPA-HIP - Iowa Habitat and Access Program (IHAP)

The Iowa Habitat and Access Program (IHAP) is the Iowa DNR public hunting access program which kicked off in 2011. In 2020 the Iowa DNR was awarded ~\$1.3 million in VPA-HIP funding which was leveraged with an additional ~\$530,000 in Habitat Stamp Funds. So far, the Iowa DNR has enrolled 16,415 acres during this sign-up period with ~\$50,000 remaining funds to allocate. In total 32,533 acres are enrolled on 231 sites that the landowners allow to be open to the public for hunting. Fishing and trapping are not authorized on IHAP sites. PLP staff evaluate each

potential property and write a wildlife habitat development and management plan and provide technical assistance for the implementation of the habitat improvements that the landowner causes to be made. The Iowa DNR provides incentive payments to the landowner on agreed upon years.

\$1 from every Habitat Stamp purchased in Iowa goes to fund IHAP. This equates to approximately \$170,000 annually. The Habitat Stamp fund is used to leverage other federal funds to fully maximize the program's enrollment potential. The DNR is currently working to evaluate the program by surveying both participating landowners and hunting license buyers.

Prairie Partners Program

Iowa DNR, Iowa PF and the Iowa Native Seed Growers Association (INSGA) entered into an agreement in 2003 where INSGA donates 5% of specified seed sales to DNR/PF seed trust fund. The trust fund is split 50:50 by DNR and PF. The funds are typically used to provide landowners an incentive to seed natives by providing a 1 to 1 cost-share program for the cost of the seed. In 2022, 501.4 acres were seeded to diverse, native prairie on private lands via DNR's PLP efforts.

Competitive State Wildlife Grant (C-SWG)

	Partnering States	Location	Total Grant	Iowa Federal Funds	Matching Funds	Total Iowa Funds	Iowa PL Funds	Focus
Blanding's Turtle Conservation in Iowa and Illinois	IL	IA & IL	\$676,495	\$250,000	\$87,434	\$337,434	~\$71,734	Grasslands and Wetlands
Bat Conservation in Iowa and Illinois	IL	IA & IL	\$673,916	\$250,000	\$83,500	\$333,500	~\$80,000	Forests and Woodlands



Annual Private Lands Report Midwest Private Lands Working Group May 9th – 11th 2023, Wisconsin Dells, WI

Walk-In Hunting Access Program (WIHA)



The 27th year of the WIHA program saw total acreage enrolled in the program decrease slightly (for the 4th consecutive year) at almost **1.12 million acres (1.16 in 2021, 1.18 in 2020)**. We have also been able to provide long-term options to landowners with both VPA-HIP and WSFR. CRP acres continue to decrease, thus, a major contributing factor to the loss in total acres.



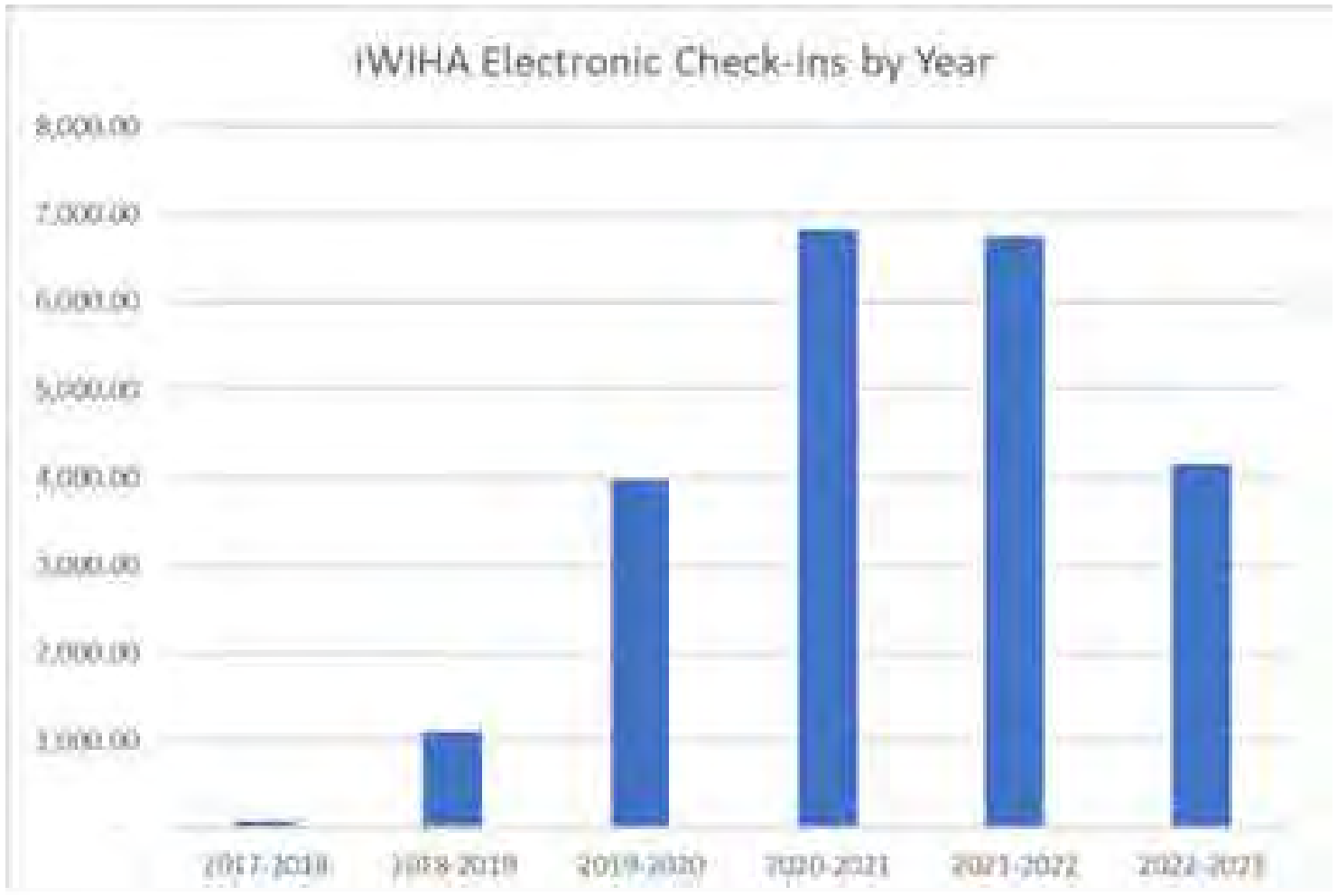
Voluntary Public Access & Habitat Incentive Program (VPA-HIP)

Kansas was awarded a **(3) year, \$2.1 million VPA-HIP grant in 2020**. We are targeting CRP, ACEP-WRE and Eastern riparian habitats. In March of 2022 we sent approximately 17,000 VPA-HIP postcards to all CRP participants and ACEP-WRE landowners. The response was extremely positive, and we were able to fully obligate all funds in April 2022. We were able to add **35,861 total acres** through this award for public hunting access. We were also able to add 271 acres of ponds, 4.4 stream miles and 2 river access sites for public fishing access. Kansas has a current enrollment of **75,000 total acres** for hunting access through (3) total VPA-HIP awards since 2011.

Interactive Walk-In Hunting Access (iWIHA)

The Interactive Walk-In Hunting Access (iWIHA) program continued its popularity and success into the 2022 Fall hunting season. From September 1, 2022 through January 31st, 2023 the iWIHA program facilitated **4,786 hunter check-ins** (5,629 hunter check-ins in 2021 on 79 tracts) on **92 individual tracts** totalling **16,300 acres**. This slight decrease can mostly be attributed to the transition from iSportman to Brandt. Brandt was contracted to build KDWP's digital licensing platform. The decision was made to tie our check-in properties to the same system for a one-stop-shop atmosphere. The transition, beneficial in the long-term, did not come without issues.

Recurring bugs seemed to plague the program early-on but has improved steadily. Two scheduled updates are in the works for Summer 2023. This program continues to expand and provide opportunities near urban centers and continues to grow in acreage and popularity.



Private Lands Habitat Specialists

In 2021 we were able to add to our WSFR grant a 4th **Habitat Specialist** position (from 3 in 2020). We are prioritizing WIHA lands for Habitat Specialist work and have received additional WIHA interest due to this project. This 3-year grant ended December, 2020 and is renewed for another (3) years. These positions were able to treat **4,168 acres in 2022** (3,536 acres in 2021). Primary practices prescribed are invasive tree control, prescribed fire, and chemical vegetation control to promote native, warm-season grasses and forbs.



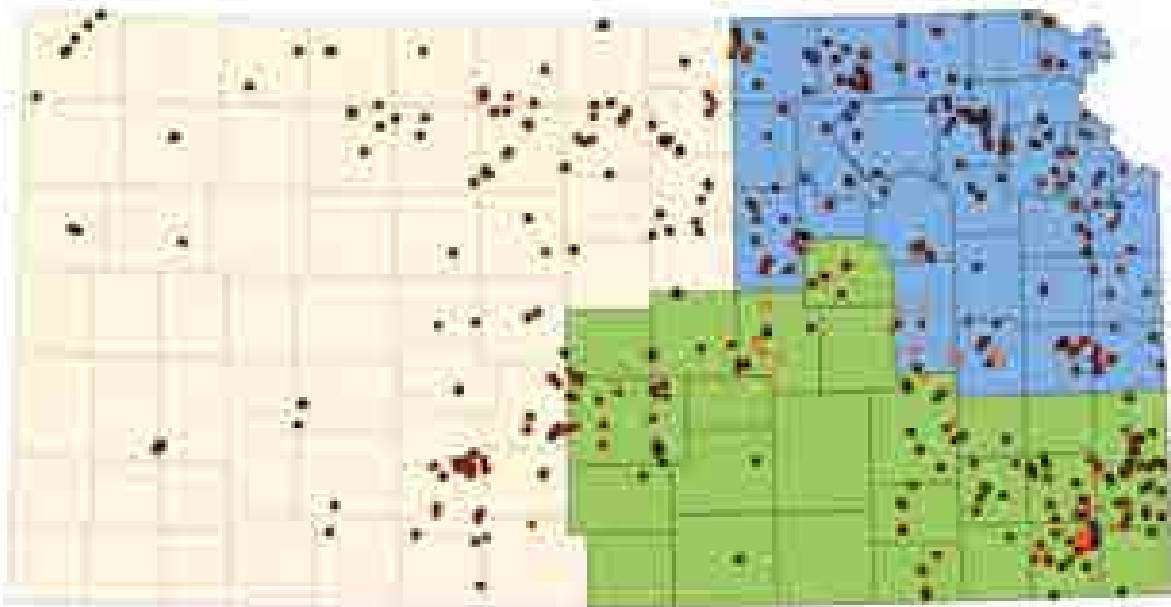
Private Land Habitat Work – Habitat First



The eighth year of the Habitat First program saw landowner interest continue to climb; due in-part by matching to WSFR. 2022 saw Kansas incentivize **185 projects** (177 in 2021), statewide. Overall, we spent **\$455,502** for direct incentive payments to landowners. Our staff were able to treat **50,653 acres** with beneficial wildlife habitat practices. We were able to transition the funding from a (3) year \$1.7 million project (\$566K per year) to an annual project of **\$1.2 million per year**. This funding has allowed us to ramp up our equipment purchases for general habitat work on private lands as well as specialized equipment for our new Habitat Specialist positions.



Habitat First & Habitat Specialists FY22 (W-103, W-104, W-123)



Legend

- Habitat First Reporting FY2022
- Habitat First FY2022
- KSWP_2022 (Habitat Specialist)

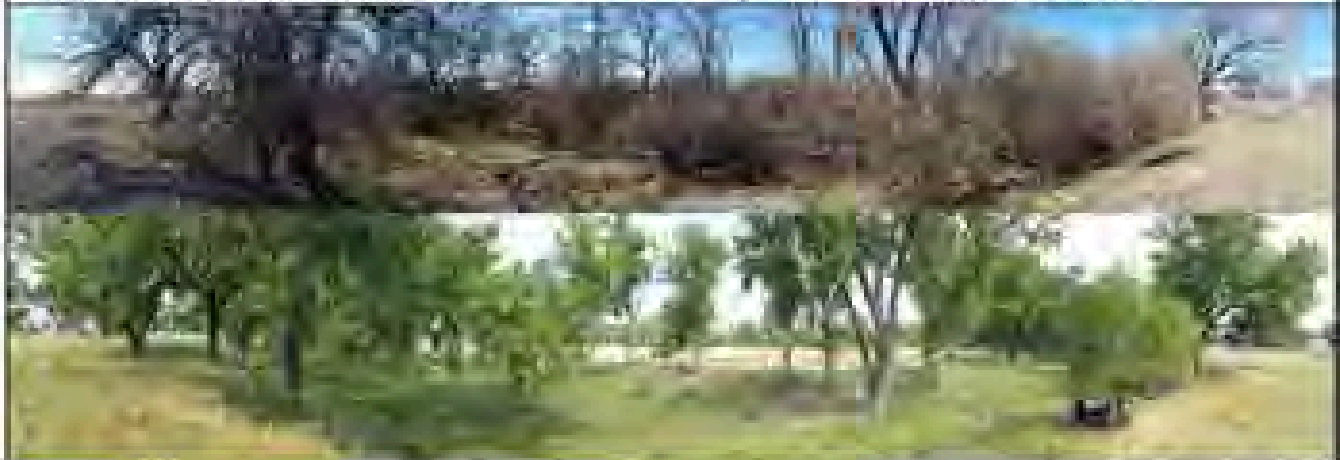


HY2022 Habitat Trust Treasor Acres & Practices

Practice	HE Acres Treated	Value of Materials
Brush Management	4,842.00	Acres
Deferred Grazing	456.41	Acres
Delayed Spraying- Wheat Stubble Mgmt	23.00	Acres
Discing	77.81	Acres
Downed Tree Stump	2.00	Acres
Edge Feathering/Coppicing	25.00	Acres
Fence	150.00	Acres
Forest Thinning	52.35	Acres
Interseed	178.30	Acres
Mowing	2.00	Acres
Plant-Cover Crop	627.30	Acres
Plant-Foral Pile	11.40	Acres
Plant-Forb	2.00	Acres
Plant-Grass	16.75	Acres
Plant-Grass/Forb	971.51	Acres
Plant-Pollinator	17.50	Acres
Plant-Shrub*	181.30	Acres
Plant-Tree*	87.60	Acres
Prescribed Fire	646.50	Acres
Prescribed Grazing	200.00	Acres
Unharvested Hay Strip	60.00	Acres
Wild Exclusion	10.00	Acres
Vegetative Ground-Overlay	1,131.90	Acres
Water Control Structure**	115.50	Acres
Weed Barrier Fabric*	15.00	Acres
Wetland Development-Large	88.40	Acres
Wetland Enhancement	11.40	Acres
Materials, Services & Equipment Provided**	23,309.50	Acres
Direct Biological Assessment	11,056.80	Acres
Habitat Specialists (W-103, W-121)	4,168.50	Acres
*Converted to Acres		
**Applies to material provided		
TOTAL ACRES TREATED	50,653.05	Acres
TOTAL INCENTIVES PAID TO LANDOWNERS	\$ 455,502.10	
TOTAL VALUE OF MATERIALS PROVIDED	\$ 144,377.25	
HE INCENTIVE PROJECTS (Contracts)	185	
NON-INCENTIVE PROJECTS	203	
HABITAT SPECIALISTS PROJECTS	42	
TOTAL HABITAT PROJECTS	430	

Materials, Services & Equipment Provided - Breakdown

Materials		
Cover Crop Seed	400.00	Acres
Food Plot Seed	8,080.90	Acres
Grass/Forb Custom Seed Mix	2,297.80	Acres
Forbs & Forb Plugs	706.25	Acres
Grass Seed	377.42	Acres
Herbicide	1,491.00	Acres
Trees, Shrubs & Weed Barrier Fabric	71.00	Acres
Equipment Loaned		
Prescribed Fire Equipment	1,767.00	Acres
Grass Drill	13,416.00	Acres
Weed Barrier Fabric Machine	62.00	Acres
Root Plow	1,378.00	Acres
Spray Equipment	808.00	Acres
Tree Planter	803.00	Acres
Technical Assistance & other services	6,376.20	Acres
TOTAL MATERIALS, SERVICES, EQUIPMENT PROVIDED	23,309.80	Acres
Direct Biologist Assistance		
Brush Management	457.00	Acres
Isking	39.00	Acres
Forest Thinning	90.00	Acres
Mowing	5.00	Acres
Plant-Cover Crop	3.00	Acres
Plant-Forb	9.00	Acres
Plant-Grass	150.00	Acres
Plant-Grass/Forb	18.30	Acres
Plant-Shrub	98.00	Acres
Prescribed Fire Assistance	11,518.00	Acres
Vegetation Control-Chemical	691.00	Acres
TOTAL DIRECT BIOLOGIST ASSISTANCE	13,050.30	Acres



Farm Bill Updates

Great Plains Grassland Initiative (Working Lands for Wildlife)

Continues to see millions in annual dedicated funding from EQIP
Primary focus on brush management, Rx Fire, pest management (ERC)

Bobwhite WLFW

Kansas opted-in, 2020.
Rolled out in FFY23 with **\$117,000** allocated in Year 1
New NOBO fund pool created
ACT NOW ranking process.
Fully obligated all funds by March 2023.



Monarch Butterfly WLFW

Funded (6) contracts for \$28,102 in FFY22.
FFY23 funds were included with NOBO; limited

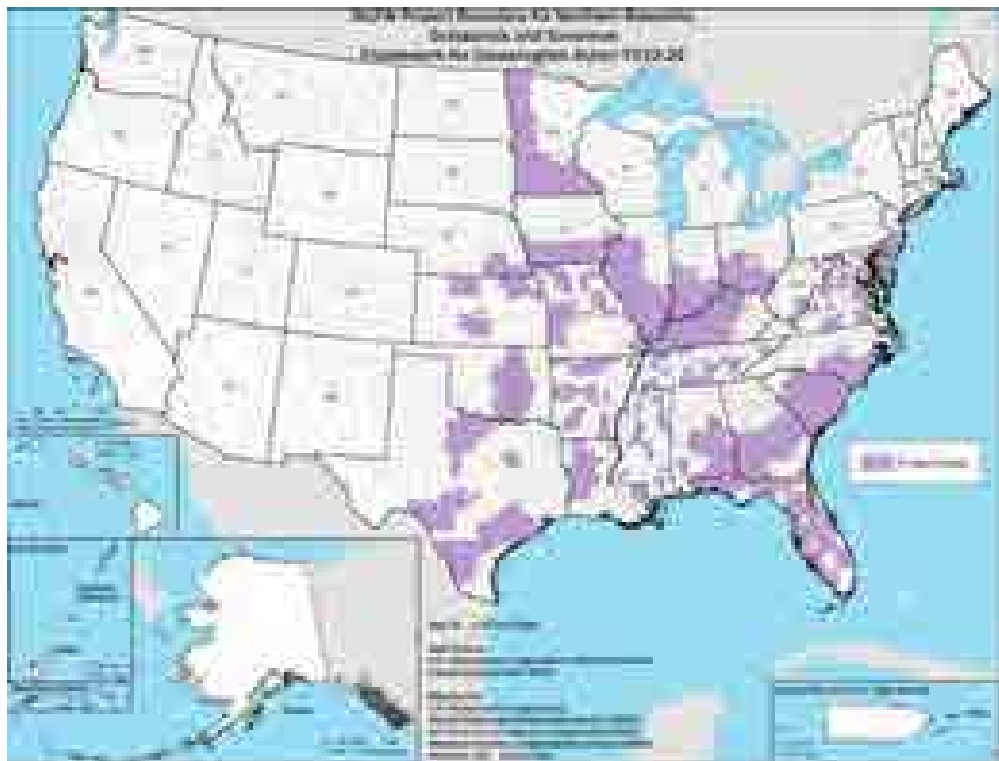
CRP

Kansas is down to about 1.75 million acres, lowest enrollment totals since 1987 and about half of peak in 2007 (**46% less!**).

Grassland CRP was highly successful in Kansas once again. Signup 204 saw Kansas accept **269,211 acres**.

EQIP

Wildlife Related Pools: **301 contracts for \$9.5 million**. **Reached the 10% wildlife** practice threshold for FFY22. The most significant reason for this increase is GPGL projects, brush management and Rx Fire.



Kentucky recently completed the development of a private lands database to be able to track and report accomplishments. Was able to establish a waiver that allows landowners to actively participate in Rx fire, which allowed us to put on our first 4- Learn N Burns across the state with a total of 53 landowners attending. We are currently working on 3- 30,000-acre Focal projects through NRCS, each focusing on a different working landscape (Pasture, Crop, and Forest). In the Statewide EQIP Wildlife Initiative, we obligated \$1,564,980 over 159 contracts for habitat improvement in 2023. For the SEKESH fund, we obligated \$650,495 over 49 contracts of wildlife-focused Forest Stand Improvement in this predominately forested region for 2023.



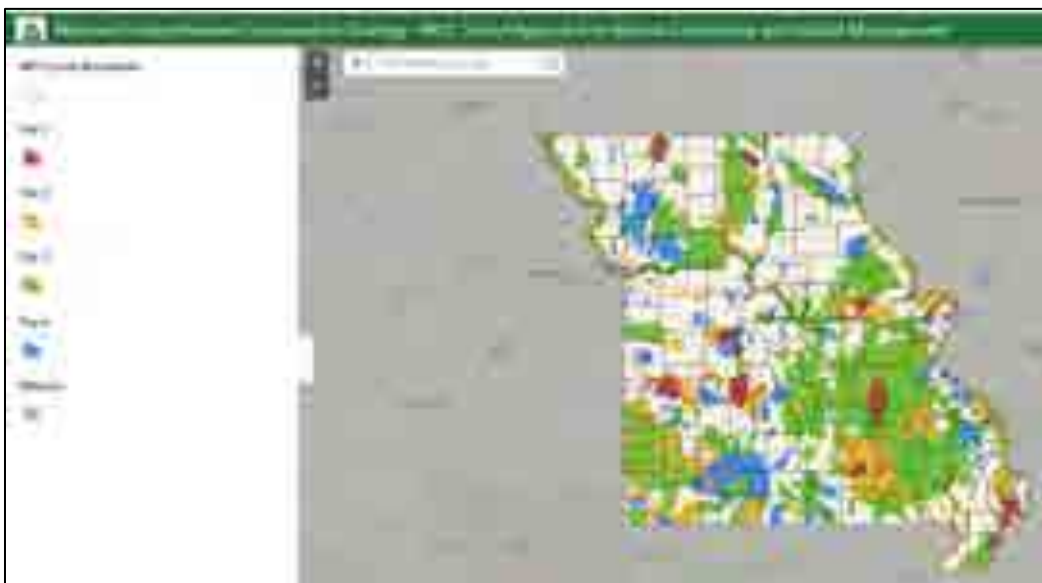
Missouri Department of Conservation Private Lands State Report
2023 MAFWA Private Lands Working Group
May 9-11, 2023

MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION MISSION To protect and manage the forest, fish, and wildlife resources of the state; to facilitate and provide opportunity for all citizens to use, enjoy and learn about these resources.

COMMUNITY AND PRIVATE LAND CONSERVATION (CPLC) BRANCH MISSION Our focus is connecting people with nature where they live and helping landowners and communities meet their goals while enhancing fish, forest, and wildlife conservation. We accomplish this by providing superior customer service and support to our partners and field staff across the state and through collaboration with other branches.

IMPLEMENTING THE STRATEGIC PLAN The MDC strategic plan, *Missouri Conservation: Design for the Future*, was unveiled in 2018 and developed to guide MDC during FY19-23. The plan outlines 3 simple goals: take care of nature; connect people with nature; and maintain the public trust. We are in the process of updating the strategic plan for FY24.

TIERED APPROACH TO NATURAL COMMUNITY AND HABITAT MANAGEMENT The tiered approach to natural community/habitat management is one of MDC's strategies for applying the Missouri Comprehensive Conservation Strategy. The tiered approach prioritizes implementation of landscape-scale conservation across Missouri. Highest priority is placed on the Priority Geographies (currently 9 have been identified) and Missouri's Natural Areas. Other Conservation Opportunity Areas (COAs) are addressed next and a similar pattern is applied through successive landscapes and areas. Funding and staffing resources are prioritized by tier with Tier 1 geographies classified as the highest priority landscapes.



MDC LANDOWNER AND COMMUNITY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (LCAP)

The Community and Private Land Conservation (CPLC) field staff assisted with the planning and implementation of over \$2.2 million in funding for conservation practices on private land in both the urban and rural landscapes. Approximately \$1.44 million was spent in rural areas and approximately \$800,000 was allocated to urban areas. The LCAP pays for approximately 50-75% of the cost of installing practices such as timber stand improvement, natural community restoration, native grassland plantings, pollinator habitat and community conservation projects.

FY22 LCAP- All Practices and Funding		
Priority	LCAP Funding	Percent of total funding
Tier 1	\$ 233,201.51	10%
Tier 2	\$ 392,100.01	17%
Tier 3	\$ 1,152,556.70	51%
Tier 4	\$	0%
Non-Priority Landscape	\$ 464,585.08	21%
Total	\$ 2,242,443.30	

Summary of Select FY22 LCAP Practices Implemented on private land (Rural)

LCAP Practice	Acres
Chainsaw/Hack & Squirt/Basal Bark Application	191
Grass & forb establishment	1,275
Grassland Conversion (chemical control)	701
Grassland Prescribed Burn	3,117
Invasive Species Control	233
Old Field, Grassland, Prairie Renovation	19
Permanent Forest Openings for Wildlife	86
Temporary Forest Openings for Wildlife	15
Wetland Development	4,199
Woodland/Glade/Savanna Prescribed Burn	978
Woody Edge Development	1,646
Total Acres	12,460

- **Additional accomplishments not included above: 24,458 acres addressed in plans, 30 impoundments, 7,812 seedlings planted, 2,872 crop trees released, 5,000 linear ft of trees removed for grassland birds**

Summary of Select FY22 LCAP Practices Implemented on private land (Urban)

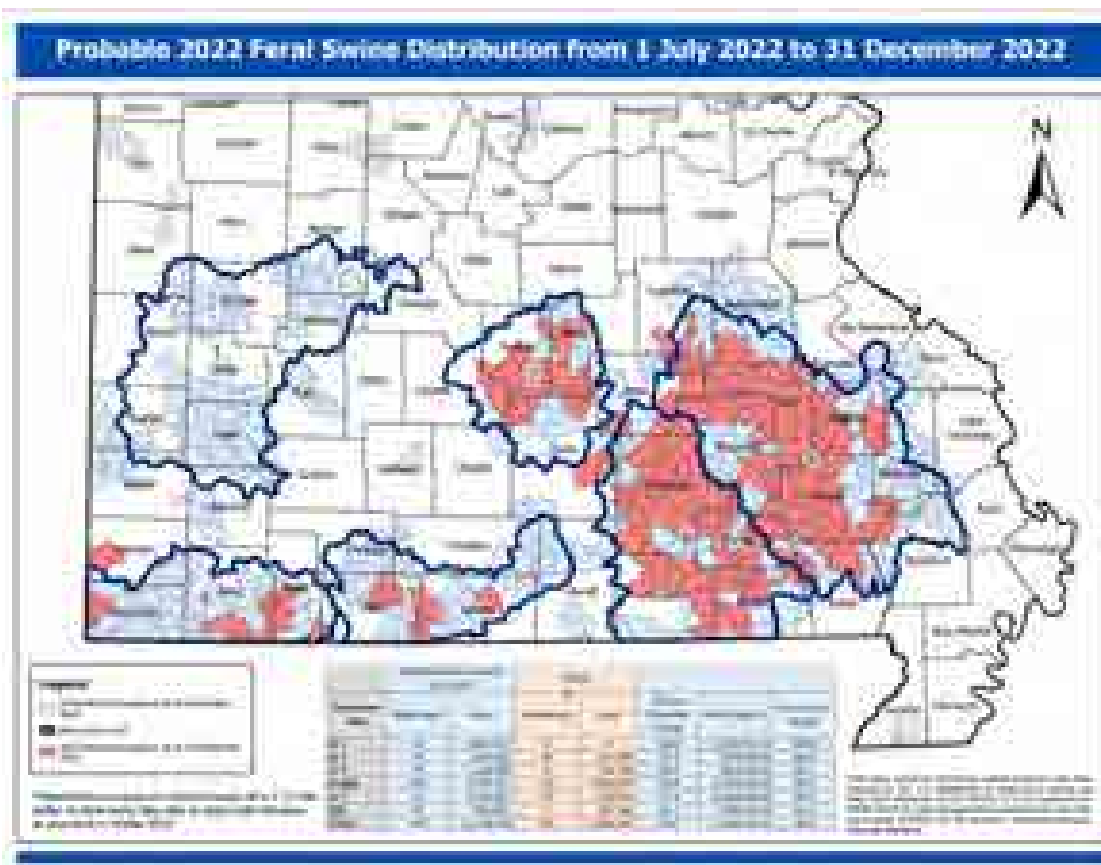
LCAP Practice	Total	Unit
Urban Grass/Forb Establishment	2	Acres
Urban Tree Establishment	2	Acres
Urban Invasive Species Removal	12	Acres
Community Conservation Grants	233	Acres
Tree Planting Projects	40	Each
Community Tree Inventories	5288	Trees
Management of Ash Trees	430	Trees
Training to Improve Community Forestry	55	Events
Removal of High-risk Trees	34	Trees
Pruning	270	Trees

MDC BAT HABITAT CONSERVATION PLAN (HCP)

Missouri supports three bat species, the Indiana bat (*Myotis sodalis*), the Gray Bat (*Myotis grisescens*), and the Northern long-eared bat (*Myotis septentrionalis*) that are currently endangered or threatened under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), and two bat species, the Little brown bat (*Myotis lucifugus*) and the Tricolored bat (*Perimyotis subflavus*) that are likely to be listed under the ESA by 2026 (collectively, the five covered species). The HCP serves as a plan that describes the Department’s approach to avoiding, minimizing, and mitigating for potential negative site-level effects on bats while continuing to manage forests and woodlands to provide long-term habitat benefits and enjoyable natural resource experiences for citizens. The HCP provides for the continuance of these activities through the issuance of an incidental take permit, while minimizing the potential for take of the covered species and maintaining full compliance with the Endangered Species Act. MDC’s HCP is one of the first bat HCPs from across the country that include private land as eligible lands to be included in the incidental take permit. The permit was issued for a time period of 50 years.

ELIMINATING FERAL HOGS IN MISSOURI

The Missouri Feral Hog Elimination Partnership (Partnership) is comprised of over 15 federal and state agencies, as well as agriculture and conservation NGOs, collaborating under the common goal of eliminating feral hogs from public and private lands throughout Missouri. During 2022, the Partnership removed 6,289 hogs from the landscape, assisted 709 landowners, and scouted 3,707,473 acres. In addition to on-the-ground operations, the Partnership placed equipment into Soil and Water Conservation Districts in areas with high feral hog activity; distributed mail-out landowner surveys to collect information regarding feral hog damage, mitigation, and removal efforts; and conducted landowner and community outreach activities throughout the southern portion of the state.



Probable feral hog distribution from 2016 compared to 2022. The blue represents watersheds occupied by feral hogs and eliminated since 2016. The red represents the probable distribution of feral hogs in 2022.

BLACK BEAR HUNTING

MDC has established three Bear Management Zones (BMZ) in southern Missouri and will issue annual permit numbers and harvest quotas for each of the three BMZs. Each permit will be for a specific BMZ and may be used on public or private property within the BMZ. There is a fee of \$10 per applicant. Applicants must select one of three BMZs. Those selected will then be eligible to buy a BMZ-specific permit at a cost of \$25. MDC will offer 400 permits for the taking of a maximum of 40 black bears during the 2023 Missouri black-bear hunting season this fall.



Permit and harvest quotas for the Oct. 16-25 bear season will be:

- BMZ 1: Permit quota of 200 issued with a harvest quota of 20 bears.
- BMZ 2: Permit quota of 150 issued with a harvest quota of 15 bears.
- BMZ 3: Permit quota of 50 issued with a harvest quota of 5 bears.



2022 Nebraska Private Lands Program State Report Midwest Private Lands Working Group Meeting May 9-10, 2023

The Habitat Partners Section of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission delivers private land habitat management activities and access programs, coordinates conservation partnerships, and provides wildlife education. Our goal is to change the way people think and act in respect to the health of the land.

Initiatives

Nebraska Natural Legacy Program (NNLP)

- Actively implementing Nebraska's Natural Legacy Plan, our state wildlife action plan.
- 11 coordinating/project biologists hired with various partners to implement the NNLP. They are primarily focused on working with private landowners in NNLP focus areas using a variety of funds (SWG, NE Environmental Trust).
- In 2022, 63 projects impacted 16,346 acres through grassland restoration, prescribed burns and forest restoration.

Berggren Pheasant Plan

- The Berggren Pheasant Plan 2.0 was finalized in February 2022. For more information about the Berggren Plan, visit <http://outdoornebraska.gov/pheasantplan/>.
- Private lands habitat programs are delivered by NGPC staff and many of our partnership positions (Farm Bill Wildlife Biologists and Coordinating Wildlife Biologists) and projects are funded using a wide variety of funding sources including NGPC habitat cash, federal aid and Nebraska Environmental Trust (NET) grants, and the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), among others.
- In 2022, on private lands within priority areas, 19,266 acres were positively impacted through 226 projects.

Public Access – Open Fields and Waters Program (OFW)

- During 2022-23 program year, NGPC administered 1,080 contracts, and had 375,772 total acres in public access through OFW.

Working Lands For Wildlife

- Our WLFW project focuses on greater prairie-chicken habitat in the eastern Sandhills.
- Since 2017, 67 WLFW Projects totaling 73,738 acres have been completed.
- Partners including NRCS, NGPC, USFWS, STF, NFWF, and PF are assisting with TA and FA
- Practices include brush management, Rx fire, and planned grazing system infrastructure
- NGPC joined the Northern Bobwhite WLFW effort in 2021 – currently 10 projects in the works that will impact 950 acres once completed
- NGPC/PF/NRCS added a Conservation Delivery Technician in 2022.

Farm Bill Wildlife Biologist Partnership

- We currently have 28 partnership field positions with Pheasants Forever and/or the NRCS including 20 Farm Bill Wildlife Biologists and 8 Coordinating Wildlife Biologists.
- The positions are cost-shared and/or administered between NGPC, PF, NRCS, and on two positions the Rainwater Basin Joint Venture.
- In 2022 a total of 153,110 acres were impacted by technical assistance planning with 6,032 landowners.

Rainwater Basin Joint Venture

- In 2022 the RWBJV partners implemented various conservation practices including: wetland restorations, sedimentation removal, irrigation pit fills (to restore watershed hydrology), tree removal, prescribed fire and prescribed grazing infrastructure. Primary landscape focus was in Nebraska's Rainwater Basin and Sandhills.
- A new Wetland Reserve Easement Program has approved 2 applications on 138 acres. The WREP provides the flexibility to pass center pivots over an easement to maintain irrigation efficiency and conserve the wetland.

Regional Conservation Partnership Program

- The Cropland Cover for Soil Health and Wildlife RCPP project has been renewed for 2021-2025. The project aims to increase the usage of multi-species cover crop mixes for the benefit of soil health and wildlife habitat. To date 21 projects impacting 2,373 acres have been completed.
- We are partnering with the Nebraska Forest Service on an Alternative Funding Arrangement RCPP. The Nebraska Forest Restoration Partnership aims to restore the quality, sustainability, and resiliency of Nebraska's forests. The project will target forest resources outlined in the Nebraska Natural Legacy Project and the Commission will focus on providing technical assistance to forest owners. As a portion of this NGPC, NFS and NRCS are partnering to provide training to natural resource professionals on forestry assistance.

Wetland Reserve Easements

- The Wetlands Reserve Program has protected over 83,265 acres of wetlands across the state. Staff has assisted with the enrollment, restoration, or evaluation of nearly all of these sites.
- NRCS-NE received funding for EWPP-Floodplain Easements due to flooding in 2019. So far 8 applications have been approved on 1,320 acres.
- Our staff also provided technical assistance on many of the compatible use permit applications. We have hired a WRE Management Biologist, with funding provided by NRCS and the Rainwater Basin Joint Venture.

Prairie Grouse Initiative

- This funding is focused on restoration of greater prairie-chicken habitat in the eastern one-third of Nebraska.
- We are focusing the efforts on private lands in 7 Biologically Unique Landscapes (based on our Statewide Action Plan) in eastern and central Nebraska.
- Partners: USFWS, Sandhills Task Force, NFWF, Northern Prairies Land Trust, NRCS and PF
- In 2022, 25,042 acres were managed through this initiative on 25 projects, including invasive tree removal (mostly cedar) and prescribed fire.

General and Continuous CRP Sign-ups

- Nebraska has 1,845,677 acres enrolled in CRP (includes Grassland CRP). 53,306 acres expire in 2023.
- Grasslands CRP has been very popular in Nebraska with 1,227,343 acres enrolled.
- Our Migratory Bird SAFE has enrolled 1,939 acres of wetlands to date.

Prescribed Fire in Nebraska

- The Nebraska Prescribed Fire Council continued its progress addressing issues related to prescribed fire.
- Implementation of the NGPC Prescribed Fire Standard Operating Procedures continues.
- There are currently 15 prescribed burn associations and 18 mobile prescribed fire units in the state through a partnership with Pheasants Forever.
- The 2022 Great Plains Fire Summit was held August 23-25, 2022 in North Platte, NE with 248 attendees.

Cool Water Stream Management Plan

- Research in Sandhills streams on at-risk fish species habitat, distributions and populations (year 1 of 2)
- Completed stream habitat enhancements at Sowbelly Creek (Sioux County) and Bordeaux Creek (Dawes Co.)
- Pre- and post-fish ladder investigations of fish movements on 3 north-central Nebraska stream sites. (year 1 of 3)
- Installed low-tech in-stream structures on two NE Nebraska private lands stream sites, testing stream functionality and resiliency (year 1 of 3)

- State Wildlife Grant funded project to develop a Plains Topminnow Conservation Management Plan (year 1 of 3)

Sandhills Task Force

- This is a locally led initiative by ranchers, community leaders, conservation partners, and agencies to maintain and restore functional native grasslands and wetlands in what may be the largest intact grassland landscape remaining in North America. Section staff serve on the board and assist in evaluating and implementing projects.

Great Plains Grassland Initiative

- Pulling together various programs of our own, and those of other conservation partners, we are working on developing focal areas for this – some of which are already identified and under active management.
- We have a coalition of over 30 different partners including state, federal, NGO, University and Private Landowner Groups involved in this
- We acquired a \$4 million America The Beautiful Challenge NFWF grant – approximately \$1.7 million of that will be targeting this initiative. \$1.5 million will be used to add 3-4 positions involved in this initiative with the remaining \$800,000 going towards stream and wetland restoration within the GPGI area.
- We are working with UNL and NRCS to identify units across our grasslands and will be assigning team members from various partners to each unit – those team members will work together on their unit.



MAFWA Private Lands Report – Spring 2023

Budget and Organizational Structure:

The 2021-2023 Private Lands Initiative (PLI) budget appropriations total \$21,380,597.00. This budget is roughly broken down as follows:

- \$14.0M – Habitat and access programs/payments
- \$3.0M – Wildlife Depredation and Response Policy
- \$3.0M – Salaries, Indirect, Travel, etc....
- \$600,000 – Directed to Fisheries – Save Our Lakes Program
- \$800,000 – Grants and Partnerships

The Private Lands Initiative has three primary goals:

1. To conserve and enhance habitats for fish and wildlife populations.
2. To provide landowners interested in wildlife conservation with assistance for developing and protecting wildlife habitat; and
3. To provide the public with opportunities to access fish and wildlife resources on private land, the primary focus being hunting access through the Private Land Open To Sportsmen (PLOTS) program.

The PLI Section is located within the Department’s Wildlife Division. The PLI Section Leader supervises three full time employees located in the Department’s headquarters office Bismarck: a West Region Supervisor, an East Region Supervisor, and a GIS Database Specialist. Each Regional Biologist supervises four Private Land Biologists located in district field offices,



PLI Program Overview:

The PLI Section administers several habitat-based access programs with varying payment levels and agreement terms through the PLOTS program. Landowner agreements are required to be open for walk-in public access for hunting. The PLI Section also administers the Department’s Wildlife Depredation Response Policy, administers several grants, and sponsors other wildlife habitat management partnerships and projects.

PLOTS. The PLI Section administers the PLOTS program, which provides technical and financial assistance for developing habitat and providing walk-in public access for hunting. Payment structures, payment types and agreement lengths vary depending on type of agreement and land use. Some

agreements piggyback with other federal USDA programs such as CRP or WRE, while other agreements are standalone agreements with no federal nexus. PLOTS payments may be one-time, upfront, or annual and agreement lengths vary from two years up to 30 years, depending upon the type of agreement. Approximately 800,000 acres of PLOTS were available for the 2021 fall hunting season.

CREP Riparian Project. The North Dakota Riparian Project provides incentives to producers to establish filter strips, riparian buffers, and pollinators on eligible cropland. Producers receive annual rental payments, incentives, and cost share from USDA – Farm Service Agency and the North Dakota Game and Fish Department. 20,000 acres are allocated for the program. State funds include Department PLOTS funds as well as funds received through an Outdoor Heritage Grant. CREP acres are required to be open for walk-in hunting access through PLOTS.

Wildlife Food Plot Seed Promotion:

The Department provided a free food plot mix to landowners in 2023. This is an educational campaign to inform the public about the value of highly diverse cover crops for soil health, pollinators, and wildlife habitat. The mix consisted of multiple species that provides flowers to attract insects for upland game bird broods. The seed mix is neonicotinoid-free. Approximately 772 acres was distributed this year to 179 cooperators. These acres do not require to be enrolled in PLOTS, but reasonable public access is encouraged, and landowners cannot charge a fee to hunt. Furthermore, the Department has made the switch to neonicotinoid-free food plots on state-owned Wildlife Management Areas and food plots that are a component of any PLOTS agreement.

Grants, Partnerships and Farm Bill activity:

The Department received an Outdoor Heritage Fund (OHF) grant totaling \$1.9M in 2014. These grant funds have been fully obligated and used to secure over 3,000 acres of expired CRP or newly established habitat, as well as approximately 1,600 acres of riparian and shoreline habitat. Agreement lengths vary from 6-20 years. In 2015, the Department received a second OHF grant totaling \$3M. This grant is matched with Department PLOTS funds and leveraged with USDA CREP funds. The 20,000-acre CREP focuses on riparian buffers, filter strips and pollinator habitat. In 2020, the Department partnered with the North Dakota Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) for a third OHF grant totaling \$270,000 to increase wildlife and pollinator habitat and reduce potential nonpoint sources of pollutants impairing water quality in the Red River Valley. The program is delivered through local soil conservation district watershed coordinators. Total partner contributions, including funds from the Department, DEQ, and matching funds from the producers total nearly \$1.4M for this five-year project.

The Department continued its partnership with Pheasants Forever to fund Precision Ag Conservation Specialists (PACS). North Dakota PF currently has three PACS. The Department is seeking to get Farm Bill biologists back in North Dakota in the near future; discussions are taking place.

The Department continued its Grassland Habitat Partnership with local Soil Conservation Districts by providing cost share on native grass drills. Nearly 20 SCDs have purchased drills over the past 7 years through this project.

The Department continued a partnership with the NDSU Hettinger Research Extension Center (HREC) to conduct prescribed burns on PLOTS. The project is aimed at enhancing grass diversity, reducing encroachment of woody and other undesirable species, and to improve the overall health of the grassland. Prescribed burns are part of a patch-burn-graze rotation on these acres.

The Department is conducting aspen management on select properties enrolled in its PLOTS program and on Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs). The Department is collaborating with the ND Forest to develop a Landscape Forest Stewardship Plan for the Turtle Mountain region. A consultant has been hired to write the plan, host focus group meetings with stakeholders and provide a final report in late 2023.

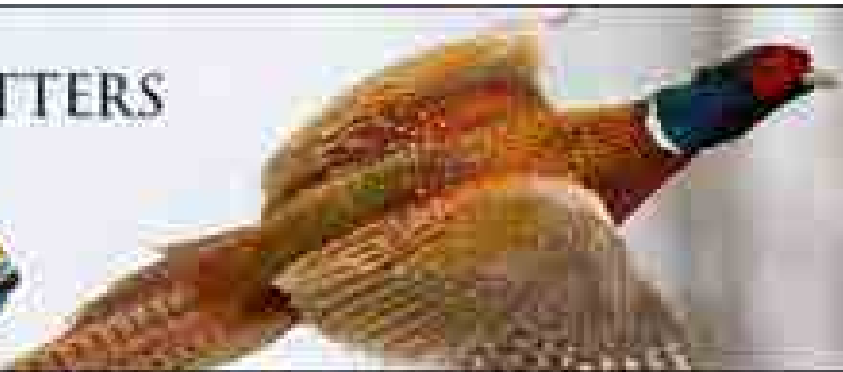
As part of the Department's Meadowlark Initiative, the Department and partners developed an RCPP in 2020. Two signups have been held. The signup in 2021 resulted in 38 offers being accepted, totaling nearly \$2.5M. The second signup held in 2022 resulted in 49 offers totaling approximately \$2.4M. Practices in the RCPP included native grassland restoration, grassland enhancements, grazing systems and infrastructure. All FA for the grant has been obligated through these two signups. (5 years of funds were fully obligated in two signups). The Department is seeking to shift unobligated TA-I to FA to hold a third signup. We are also seeking to inject more funds into the grant as part of discussions about increased IRA funds for RCPP. As part of RCPP there will be grassland bird and pollinator monitoring, which began in 2022, but will ramp up in 2023. There is also a landowner human dimension survey and carbon sequestration work planned. Another component of the MI is awareness and education, showcasing the importance and value of native grasslands to general citizenry.

The Department continues to work on all provisions of the 2018 farm bill, primarily CRP, CCRP and CREP. North Dakota has one CREP, several CCRP initiatives such as CP37 Duck Nesting Habitat, and six CRP SAFE projects, including Habitat for Pheasants, Eastern Tallgrass Prairie Restoration, Coteau-Drift Prairie Waterbank, Southwest Sagebrush Restoration, Habitat for Honeybees and Declining Grassland Birds. All six SAFE projects were updated in 2020 to meet provisions of the 2018 farm bill. Following the SAFE project updates, North Dakota also updated its state Conservation Priority Areas (CPAs) and Wildlife, Water Quality and Air Quality Zones. Interest in CRP is waning in North Dakota. There was nearly 3.4M acres enrolled at its peak in 2008, as of 2022, approximately 1M are currently enrolled with the majority of those now being Continuous CRP acres. The Department and its partners are actively promoting CCRP over GCRP.

The Departments Private Land Initiative is positioned well with the addition of 3 new positions in the most recent legislative session, as well as increased spending authority and ability to develop habitat without requiring public access. Until now, any habitat work the Department cost shared on was required to be enrolled in the Private Land Open To Sportsmen (PLOTS) hunting access program.

North Dakota has experienced tremendous habitat losses over the past decade, over 2.4M acres of native grasslands and CRP are gone from the landscape. With less interest in CRP the Department will be expanding its habitat reach beyond PLOTS. We will be developing internal programs for habitat development but will also develop partnerships to develop habitat. Moving forward, in 2023, the Department will be hiring one additional private land biologist to expand our existing PLOTS program and a Habitat Manager to develop a new habitat program and expand partnerships. In 2024, we will hire an additional private land biologist. The Department has made habitat a priority through various marketing and outreach efforts as well. The Habitat Matters handout was used during the latest legislative session.

HABITAT MATTERS



WHAT'S BEEN LOST



WHAT'S AT STAKE



WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE

INVEST IN PRIVATE LANDS

With over 95% of lands held in private ownership in North Dakota investing habitat on private lands is essential.



MAFWA Private Lands Working Group Wisconsin Dells, WI
Hosted By: Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
5/9-11/2023



Ohio Report

Provided by John Kaiser, Private Lands Program Administrator

Private Lands Program Structure: Under the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, we are in the Division of Wildlife. Under the Division of Wildlife, we are in the Wildlife Management and Research section. Under this section the private lands program administrator heads up the private lands section. We currently have 5 wildlife management consultants (previously they were named “private lands biologists”) amongst the 5 districts in the state that provide habitat management technical assistance to landowners. The WMCs are supervised at the district level by assistant wildlife management supervisors. We are in the process of hiring 8 additional WMCs totaling 13 WMCs in Ohio with private and some public lands responsibilities. The thought behind this is to provide both private and public lands (approx. 20% of WMC time) services. The work on public lands would focus on small satellite areas where the biologist would monitor habitat and execute management activities primarily with contractors.



Water Quality – H2Ohio: Ohio has been focusing heavily on water quality with the continued support of the H2Ohio initiative (148 million from the Ohio legislature in July of 2019 and spearheaded by Governor DeWine). Ohio Dept. of Natural Resources has spent approximately 89.6 million on wetland restoration projects. These projects include enhancements to coastal marshes and restoration of inland wetlands and floodplain wetlands. Most of the projects highlighted in the dashboard below are what we consider grant projects. These projects typically pay 100% of wetland restoration (design, admin, and restoration expenses) projects. Most of these projects are on public lands and private lands that are enrolled are protected with an easement or environmental covenant.



Out of the H2Ohio Water Quality efforts, our private lands section initiated and operate the H2Ohio Water Quality Incentive Program (WQIP). The program was offered in combination with the Lake Erie (LE) Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) to provide one-time payments of \$2,000/acre for new LE CREP wetlands and forested riparian buffers to help improve water quality in the Lake Erie watershed. The ODNR WQIP team worked with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Ohio Department of Agriculture (ODA), Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD), and several other partners to implement the program. Below is a summary of the total projects and a bar chart representing a major boost to new LE CREP wetland projects. Half of these wetlands were constructed last year and the remaining portion will be constructed this season.