



Understanding Farmer Perceptions of Working Wetlands

Dr. Cheryl Wachenheim, North Dakota State University



The most valuable wetlands to breeding ducks are temporary and seasonal — small and shallow — prairie potholes. These wetlands, many of which are only a fraction of an acre, drive North American duck production.

Small wetlands allow for high breeding duck densities, provide the essential food resources for nesting females, and serve as nurseries for duck broods. When conditions are right, they help strong renesting efforts that lead to the big fall flights all duck hunters dream about.

But these wetlands are also at great risk. Minnesota and Iowa have lost more than 90 percent of their wetland base. North Dakota, despite having the greatest amount of prairie wetlands in the United States, has lost 50 percent of its historic wetlands. Wetlands, especially those in cropland, are perceived to be an impediment to agricultural production. When wetlands are full, they can decrease efficiency, result in lost inputs and reduce yields.

According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 93,500 acres of small wetlands were lost in the U.S. Prairie Pothole Region from 1997 to 2009. Most of the lost acres were small wetlands in cropland. Delta recognizes that creating new tools to conserve these small wetlands is essential to complement policy work and permanent easements.

Delta worked with leaders in the North Dakota farming community and the best minds in breeding duck conservation to design a new voluntary, incentive-based program to conserve small wetlands in cropland. Put simply, Delta is working with farmers to retain small wetlands.

As the first step, Delta is working with the Natural Resources Conservation Service to deliver a five-year pilot project to test the concept





in North Dakota. With funding from the North Dakota Outdoor Heritage Fund and matching support from NRCS, Delta has signed 122 agreements to conserve 9,568 individual wetlands encompassing nearly 4,800 acres. Initial response from North Dakota farmers was very enthusiastic, with nearly three times more demand than funds available for the pilot.

Surveying Farmers

A critical part of Working Wetlands project is understanding how farmers feel about the program. Delta is working with faculty and research teams at North Dakota State

University to understand how the program can be improved. In addition, Delta will be working with the researchers to survey farmers across the U.S. PPR to see how they would receive the Working Wetlands program.

We have a much larger vision for the Working Wetland program. We want to build on the success of the pilot, capture the enthusiasm of participating producers, and learn through the surveys to move the Working Wetlands concept into a large-scale regional program in the next Farm Bill.

Analysis provided by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service HAPET office

in Bismarck shows more than 1.5 million wetlands (temporary and seasonal potholes of less than 2 acres in cropland) covering nearly 646,000 acres and supporting almost 900,000 breeding ducks.

Delta staff has spent the past 18 months working with U.S. House of Representatives and Senate members to describe the incredible opportunity that a large-scale Working Wetlands represents for farmers, ducks and all of us. We are hopeful that this new program can provide an additional solution to conserve the most critical wetlands for breeding ducks, and provide for large fall flights for many years to come.



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