

NORTH AMERICAN

WETLANDS

CONSERVATION ACT

project flash

Minnesota Partnerships Receive \$100,000 for Wetlands Projects

On June 9, 2004, the North American Wetlands Conservation Council reported to the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission that it had approved **\$100,000** in funding under the North American Wetlands Conservation Act's Small Grants Program for **two projects** in **Minnesota**. The Act is nonregulatory and calls for voluntary partnerships to develop and implement wetlands and associated uplands conservation projects to benefit wildlife. Projects must meet certain biological criteria to be considered for funding, and partners must be able to match the grant request 1:1 with nonfederal funds.

Buffalo Ridge Nesting Habitat Enhancement Project

The Buffalo Ridge area in **Lyon and Lincoln Counties** in **Congressional District 7** provides some of the most productive waterfowl habitat in southwest Minnesota. However, many of the existing grasslands—waterfowl nesting habitat—that surround the area's wetlands have been degraded significantly by woody encroachment and amassing of old brome. Through better land management such as discing, interseeding, burning, and removing trees, this habitat can be improved to increase waterfowl nest success and production.

A **\$50,000** grant, together with **\$50,705** in partner funds, will expedite the acquisition, restoration, and enhancement of critical wetlands and associated uplands on public and private lands, providing waterfowl and other grassland nesting birds in the **Mississippi Flyway** with much needed breeding, resting, and feeding habitats. Lands purchased by the project partners will be donated to Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (Department) for inclusion in its Wildlife Management Area System.

The partners, Pheasants Forever, the Department, Lincoln Soil and Water Conservation District, and Lyon County Soil and Water Conservation District, will acquire two tracts totaling 85.7 acres. In addition, they will restore 18 acres of nesting cover, enhance 100 acres of grassland adjacent to wetlands, and encourage farmers to enroll approximately 1,200 acres in Farm Bill conservation programs that provide waterfowl with quality nesting cover.

Partners' work will benefit species such as mallard, blue-winged teal, wood duck, and northern shoveler, which nest in the project area. Several other species, including lesser and greater scaups, ring-necked duck, American wigeon, and canvasback, use the area's wetlands during migration. Other wetland-associated birds like American bittern, marbled godwit, Wilson's phalarope, northern harrier, and grasshopper sparrow are expected to be found nesting and feeding in the restored grasslands. The Topeka shiner, a federally and state-listed endangered minnow species, will benefit from the improved water quality in riparian habitats. Restored grasslands also provide important habitat for the state endangered burrowing owl, which nests within

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the project's boundaries. Through this project, partners also are advancing the habitat conservation goals of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan's **Prairie Pothole Joint Venture**.

For more information about this project, contact Aaron Kuehl, Pheasants Forever, Inc., akuehl@pheasantsforever.org, (507) 231-4752, or Keith Morehouse, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, keith_morehouse@fws.gov, (703) 358-1784.

Mud Lake Wildlife Management Area Project

Located in **Morrison County** in **Congressional District 8**, the project area contains above average breeding duck density and provides critical staging and migratory habitats for lesser scaup, canvasbacks, ring-necked ducks, and other migratory waterfowl. Like many other areas in the country, Morrison County's population is growing, and without land protection and management, development will encroach upon and degrade Mud Lake and its surrounding habitat complex. Partners of the Mud Lake project will use their **\$50,000** grant, plus **\$58,900** in matching funds, to acquire 70.5 acres of wetlands and associated uplands for annexation in the Mud Lake Wildlife Management Area.

The parcel to be acquired encompasses roughly 50 percent of Mud Lake's shoreline and includes 43 acres of palustrine open-water marsh, 25 acres of palustrine emergent wetlands, nearly 10 acres of palustrine scrub-shrub wetlands, and 88 acres of wet meadow habitats. Managing and restoring nesting cover adjacent to palustrine emergent wetlands provides critical breeding habitat for **Mississippi Flyway** mallards, blue-wing teal, wood ducks, northern pintails, and northern shovelers.

This acquisition also will provide quality migratory habitat for lesser scaup, which recent studies indicate may be one of the most important factors contributing to this bird's declining populations. Priority nongame and other migratory birds that will benefit from this project include species such as Hudsonian godwit, short-billed dowitcher, American woodcock, Wilson's phalarope, black and common terns, black-billed cuckoo, short-eared owl, and willow flycatcher. The project also will protect habitat for state-listed species, including Henslow's sparrow, loggerhead shrike, bald eagle, Franklin's gull, and marbled godwit. The partner's work also supports the habitat conservation goals of the **Prairie Pothole Joint Venture**.

For more information about this project, contact Matt Holland, Pheasants Forever, Inc., ringneck@tds.net, (320) 354-4377, or Keith Morehouse, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, keith_morehouse@fws.gov, (703) 358-1784.