

Wildlife is one of our most treasured natural resources. Nearly 70 percent of the nation's wildlife habitat is interspersed over privately owned landscapes. For over 70 years, America's 3,000 conservation districts have worked with various federal agencies and other partners to assist landowners and managers with natural resource problems and opportunities, including those associated with wildlife habitat management.

The future of wildlife in this country is inseparably tied to activities taking place on private lands. Decisions made by America's farmers, ranchers and forest landowners directly affect the land's plant life, soil, water and wildlife. Decisions affecting stewardship of these resources cannot be understood apart from landowners' essential need: the ability to support themselves and their families. Everything that we do on land affects wildlife one way or another. In this respect, careful forethought is needed both on working lands and in developing areas. Districts are in a crucial position at the local level for emphasizing the importance of wildlife resources that provide over a \$100 billion

Partnering

Conservation, Conflict, Compromise: Collaborating with State Agencies

In response to wildlife crop damage concerns raised by farmers and statewide agricultural organizations, the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) worked with conservation districts to create District Wildlife Specialist positions. These positions demonstrate a unique and proactive partnership among the Division of Soil and Water Conservation, Division of Wildlife, Natural Resources Conservation Service and the agricultural community.

The innovative program has expanded to 20 wildlife specialists representing 22 counties since its inception in 1998. Primary funding comes from both ODNR divisions and respective county commissioners.

District wildlife specialists require a considerable amount of technical expertise and public relations skills. They must address the often-conflicting needs and interests of farmers, wildlife enthusiasts, hunters, suburban homeowners and others, balancing these concerns and interests with Ohio's wildlife laws and district priorities.

In the same day, a Wildlife Specialist can investigate a wildlife damage complaint on a farm, identifying the 'culprit' species and determining non-lethal solutions to deter them, and then assist another landowner who wants to enhance wildlife habitat on their property.

Agriculture, wildlife diversity and quality conservation practices are all important in Ohio. The SWCD wildlife specialists are helping all of these prosper through their collective efforts to reduce wildlife damage and soil erosion, improve water quality and enhance conservation cover and wildlife habitat.

For more information, contact Fred Hammon, ODNR, at fred-hammon@dnr.state.oh.us.

Eastern New Mexico Districts Work Cooperatively for Habitat



The high plains of eastern New Mexico appear to be a flat, stark, non-productive landscape to the casual observer; but to the residents of the Llano Estacado, both human and wildlife, this area is rich in diversity. Sitting on top of the Ogallala Aquifer, the llano with both southern short grass and mid-grass prairies, is home

to the endemic species of concern—the lesser prairie-chicken and is dotted with the only wetland feature—playa lakes. Unfragmented, healthy prairies result in better habitat conditions for the prairie-chicken and allow playas, which are the primary sources of recharge for the Ogallala Aquifer, to function properly.

The Central Curry, Roosevelt, Border and Lea Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) have collaborated with NRCS and others to develop proactive programs that address these critical issues. Since 2003, the four districts have enrolled 54,174 acres in the Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program, providing cost-share for water and fences that allow for better grazing management.

Most recently, Central Curry SWCD has acquired funding through the state Office of Natural Resources Trustee and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to enroll 10 more playas into protection and restoration programs. These wildlife habitat initiatives are a result of the combined efforts of the SWCDs and their innovative supervisors, NRCS and many other state and federal agencies and non-profit groups.

For more information, contact Tish McDaniel at pmcdaniel@tnc.org.

Partnering with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program is celebrating its 20th anniversary. The program was formalized through the 2006 Partners for Fish and Wildlife Act unanimously approved by Congress. The Program provides technical and financial assistance to private landowners and tribes on a voluntary basis to help meet the habitat needs of Federal Trust Species. Field biologists work one-on-one with landowners and partners to plan, implement and monitor activities.

Conservation districts have been involved in this program since its inception, with many sponsoring one or more local projects with private landowners. An excellent example comes from the FWS Mountain-Prairie Region. The primary conservation strategy of the Partners Program in South Dakota is to work with local groups and landowners on both landscape conservation and sustainable agriculture. This philosophy is based on a partnership with the South Dakota Association and the 59 conservation districts.

As stated in a FWS publication, "This partnership has resulted in hundreds of jointly sponsored habitat projects and is a shining example of locally led conservation. County conservation districts have a proven conservation ethic and bring a critical degree of local knowledge and landowner support to resource issues. They serve as the local eyes and ears of the South Dakota Partners' effort."

For more information, visit the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program website at www.fws.gov/partners.

boost to the U.S. economy each year. In addition, fish and wildlife and their habitats offer environmental amenities such as scenic values, clean air, clean water, pollinator services, pest control and sustained biodiversity.

Conservation districts enable landowners to protect and restore ecosystem values for a wide array of wildlife while still maintaining and even improving their land productivity. Districts often work with NRCS and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to help landowners clarify their goals and bring the most suitable resources to the land whether through Farm Bill programs, the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program or others.

In addition to traditional partners, many other groups are eager to team up with districts to make improvements on private land that lead to increased wildlife habitat. They offer a smorgasbord of resources including funding, equipment and greater visibility. The partners highlighted in the following summaries provide additional opportunities for districts to combine forces with like-minded organizations to expand their on-the-ground successes.

for Wildlife

NACD Partners with the National Wild Turkey Federation

The National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTf) is a 584,000 member conservation group that focuses on conservation of the wild turkey and the preservation of America's hunting tradition.

The NWTf also addresses a variety of wildlife and forestry issues that affect many different aspects of our natural resources, including endangered species, soil erosion, water quality, invasive species and private lands.

Since 1985, the NWTf has spent over \$258 million on habitat projects ranging from tree planting to invasive species control to timber management, all in an effort to bring good conservation practices to public and private lands.

In September 2005, NACD entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with NWTf. The partnership has made great strides at putting good conservation on the ground the last two years. From Florida to California, from Texas to New Hampshire, district leaders are working with local and national NWTf leaders and field staff to improve wildlife habitat.

The NWTf has helped provide local conservation districts with equipment through their Hunting Heritage Super Fund such as no-till drills, ATV sprayers for prescribed burning and seed harvesters for native warm season grass restoration. The NWTf has also assisted many conservation districts by contributing funds to encourage conservation education programs in local schools, providing subsidies for tree planting programs for private landowners and making donations for fundraising benefits. The NWTf also partners with conservation districts on large-scale grant projects that address water quality, forest management and wildlife habitat.

The partnership between conservation districts and the NWTf is an excellent opportunity for both organizations to expand their impact at the local, state, regional and national level to further common conservation goals.

To learn more how your district can get involved with the NWTf, contact NWTf's Lynn Lewis-Weis at 1-800-THE-NWTf or llewis-weis@nwtf.net or NACD's Doug Williams at dewilliams@frontiernet.net.



Funds Available for Districts through NFWF

A number of conservation districts are actively working to conserve wildlife habitat by partnering with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF). NFWF is a private, nonprofit organization chartered by Congress in 1984. NFWF leverages federal resources for projects that directly benefit the nation's fish, wildlife, plants and habitats.

Since 2000, NFWF has awarded nearly 300 grants to conservation districts for projects in most of the 50 states. Grassland protection, wetlands restoration, streambank stabilization, fish passages, invasive species control, buffers and other habitat strategies are eligible for financial support according to NFWF's conservation initiatives. From 2005 to 2007, NFWF granted over \$3 million to conservation districts to which \$6.3 million of matching funds were added, totaling more than \$10 million of funds put onto the ground.

NFWF works directly with more than 50 corporations and over 20 federal agencies. Collaborative projects are often aimed at integrating conservation practices on agricultural, ranching and forestry operations, with the goal of improving the ecological health of private working lands.

Since its inception in 1984, NFWF has supported nearly 9,000 grants to a wide range of organizations with an interest in wildlife conservation. Through these unique partnerships with the private and public sector, over \$374 million in federal funds has been leveraged into more than \$1.2 billion in on-the-ground conservation. To find out more about NFWF's grant opportunities, visit their website at <http://www.nfwf.org>.

Additional Resources

The projects and partners highlighted above are only a sample of opportunities available to help districts work with individuals and local communities to protect natural resources in a way that preserves and enhances wildlife habitat. Additional opportunities can be found on NACD's website at www.nacdnet.org/policy/environment/wildlife.phtml.

Thank you to the following contributors who aided in the preparation of this article: Pete Heard (NRCS), Ashley Strackbein (NFWF), Lynn Lewis-Weis (NWTf), Fred Hammon (ODNR), Heather Johnson (USF&WS) and Tish McDaniel (TNC).