# PRIVATE LANDS HABITAT & ACCESS PROGRAMS

# STRATEGIC PLAN

**February 12, 2008**

## SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF GAME, FISH & PARKS

### DIVISION OF WILDLIFE—HABITAT SECTION

**Agency Mission**

The purpose of the Department of Game, Fish and Parks is to perpetuate, conserve, manage, protect, and enhance South Dakota's wildlife resources, parks, and outdoor recreational opportunities for the use, benefit, and enjoyment of the people of this state and its visitors, and to give the highest priority to the welfare of this state's wildlife and parks, and their environment, in planning and decisions.

**Division of Wildlife Mission**

The Division of Wildlife will manage South Dakota's wildlife and fisheries resources and their associated habitats for their sustained and equitable use, and for the benefit, welfare and enjoyment of the citizens of this state and its visitors.

***Our Mission Statement: "Serving People, Managing Wildlife"***

***"The goals of SD GFP private lands habitat programs are to provide technical and financial assistance to cooperating landowners for the establishment and management of wildlife habitat that will enhance the survival and reproduction of desired wildlife species and to provide public access to high quality habitat on private land for recreational opportunities."***


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# Executive Summary

From the multitude of wildlife species dependent upon its diverse landscapes to its world-famous pheasant hunting opportunities, South Dakota residents recognize these attributes as integral components of their quality of life and why many call South Dakota home. Since approximately 80% of the state's land base is under private ownership, private landowners have and will continue to serve as the stewards with the most influence over wildlife habitat conditions for resident and migratory wildlife populations.

The South Dakota Department of Game, Fish & Parks (SD GFP) recognizes landowners as essential partners in our goal to complete landscape-level conservation initiatives. Dating back to the mid-1970's, SD GFP has offered an evolving toolbox of voluntary private land habitat programs to cooperating landowners. These habitat programs have been adapted to complement opportunities offered by federal Farm Bill programs and to better meet the needs of private landowners seeking to establish and enhance wildlife habitat.

Management of wildlife not only involves biological and other science-based management practices, but also includes careful consideration of the wide array of social values held by the general public and landowners of South Dakota. As the state agency responsible for managing wildlife resources and their associated habitats, we must be diligent in using technical and financial resources to maximize the benefits to natural resources for the benefit of all citizens of South Dakota.

To successfully achieve this task, the SD GFP has developed this strategic plan to serve as an adaptive document to guide our efforts to manage habitat and provide public access to private land. A critical pillar supporting this strategic plan is the SD Wildlife Action Plan. Developed as a document to guide expenditures of congressionally-appropriated State Wildlife Grants and to provide ecologically based guidance for managing native habitats for wildlife, the SD Wildlife Action Plan emphasizes an ecosystem management approach to address conservation of all wildlife.

This strategic plan recognizes the four ecoregions (Black Hills, Great Plains Steppe, Missouri River and Eastern Prairie) defined in the SD Wildlife Action Plan, and thereby identifies unique issues, challenges and opportunities within each ecoregion. Goals, objectives and strategies have been identified and will be developed and implemented within each ecoregion. This approach recognizes the distinct characteristics between ecoregions and the need to be adaptive from a program development and delivery standpoint.

This plan provides a thorough background on the past and present efforts of the private lands habitat and public access program. It is beneficial to know where we have been when preparing for future challenges.

No other government program or piece of legislation has such a profound impact on the status of the nation's wildlife habitat and population levels as the federal Farm Bill. The SD GFP Private Lands Habitat & Access Programs could never replace the benefits of

the conservation provisions of the Farm Bill. Most of SD GFP's habitat programs are designed to complement Farm Bill programs like the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). The outcome of the Farm Bill will have great impacts on wildlife resources and could ultimately cause significant changes to this strategic plan.

While there were many important issues and concerns considered in the preparation of this plan, some that emerged as major challenges include: changing landowner demographics, pressures influencing habitat loss, commercialization of wildlife, biofuels and genetically modified crops, fostering and expanding relationships with our conservation partners, and matching services to both landscape need and landowner desire.

This strategic plan focuses on the following goals: 1) In cooperation with private landowners, manage, conserve and restore habitat to sustain diverse wildlife populations, and 2) Provide the public with high quality opportunities to access fish and wildlife resources on private land. For each goal, statewide and ecoregion specific objectives and strategies have been developed to guide implementation.

SD GFP understands that we cannot achieve these goals alone, and that this endeavor will require strong partnerships with other local, state, federal and non-governmental organizations. But most importantly, we need the support and cooperation of private landowners and a general public that is aware of South Dakota's diverse habitats and the wildlife that depend upon them.

This strategic plan for the Private Lands Habitat & Access Program will never be carved in stone; in fact, we hope it never collects dust on a bookshelf. We intend to refer to it regularly as a guiding document to adaptively address emerging issues or opportunities. While we plan to formally revisit the document again in 2013, it will remain flexible to help ensure that our children will be fortunate enough to enjoy the great wildlife resources of South Dakota.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As co-chairs of this planning effort, we would especially like to thank the core team members consisting of Paul Coughlin (Habitat Program Administrator), Larry Gigliotti, Ph.D. (Planning Coordinator/Human Dimensions Specialist), Tom Kirschenmann (Game Program Administrator), Dave Kimble (Habitat Biologist), Ron Koth (Senior Fisheries Biologist), Don McCrea (Conservation Officer Supervisor), Mark Norton (Habitat Biologist), Dave Ode (Botanist/Ecologist), Tim Olson (Senior Habitat Biologist), and Bill Smith (Senior Wildlife Biologist/Farm Bill Coordinator). These individuals not only provided a diverse background of expertise, but their input was based upon sound wildlife management while considering and incorporating the concerns of all stakeholders and the challenges and opportunities we will face in the future.

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Comments received from citizens, landowners, and other professionals of the conservation community were instrumental in developing this plan for the future direction of wildlife habitat and public access in South Dakota.

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# I. Introduction

South Dakota is blessed with a diverse and abundant wildlife resource, and its residents and visitors have come to deeply appreciate and hold close this valuable part of their lives. A diversity of habitats, from the Black Hills to the high plains, to the tallgrass of the Prairie Coteau, to the unchannelized reaches of the Missouri River, truly make South Dakota a landscape of infinite variety.

Since the majority of South Dakota lands and waters are privately owned, there is no doubt that farmers, ranchers and other private landowners are stewards of our wildlife resources and the habitats they depend on. At the same time, South Dakota Game, Fish & Parks (SD GFP) is the state agency charged with managing South Dakota's public trust wildlife resources for everyone's use, benefit and enjoyment.

A large number of South Dakotans and visitors continue to enjoy the traditional hunting and fishing pursuits found in every corner of the state. But an ever growing population segment is also participating in non-consumptive wildlife based recreational activities. Private land habitat and access will therefore continue to be of primary importance to everyone who enjoys South Dakota's rich wildlife and fisheries resources. A cooperative relationship and collaborative approach between private landowners, SD GFP and anyone who enjoys or appreciates South Dakota wildlife resources is critical to meet the public need for wildlife conservation and recreational opportunities.

SD GFP has long recognized the important role farmers, ranchers and other private landowners play in wildlife conservation and recreation. Numerous initiatives, programs, and incentives have been and continue to be offered that assist landowners with integrating wildlife habitat conservation into their own land management goals. Further, SD GFP recognizes the needs of people to have access to wildlife and recreation opportunities on both public and private lands, and therefore delivers incentives and programs that make this happen.

The dynamic nature of today's global economy has a direct influence on South Dakota's diverse landscape, and therefore our wildlife resources. This influence and resultant changes are no more obvious than on private farm and ranch lands. In the same way that landowners must continually adapt to changing economic and physical environments in order to remain successful, SD GFP must also continue to adapt to the changing needs and desires of both landowners and the public whose wildlife resources we are tasked with conserving.

This strategic plan will serve to guide SD GFP as it continues to deliver a successful private lands habitat and access program. It will also provide direction as SD GFP adapts its initiatives, programs, and incentives to the changing needs of South Dakota landowners, citizens and visitors.

## II. General Indicators of Public Attitudes Related to Wildlife & Habitat

According to the 2006 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife-Associated Recreation, South Dakota has 171,000 hunters, 135,000 anglers, and 432,000 wildlife watchers (U.S. Department of Interior 2006).

A significant proportion of South Dakota residents feel that it is very important (69%) or moderately important (26%) that South Dakota conserves/protects as much fish and wildlife as possible, where appropriate (Table 1). Also, a significant proportion of South Dakota residents feel that healthy fish and wildlife populations are very important (78%) or moderately important (19%) to the economy and well-being of South Dakota residents (Table 2) (Gigliotti 2004).

South Dakota residents also have a keen awareness of the importance of healthy ecosystems and strong desires to conserve and protect the State's wildlife resources. Most South Dakota residents feel that maintaining healthy native prairie ecosystems is important and most (86%) support using some money from hunting license fees for projects designed to conserve and enhance native prairie ecosystems and associated wildlife (Tables 1–4). There is a perception that SD GFP could do more to protect wildlife diversity in South Dakota (Table 5) (Gigliotti 2004).

Management of wildlife not only involves biological and other science-based management practices, but also includes careful consideration of the wide array of social values held by the general public and landowners of South Dakota.

Efforts to communicate and to understand the differences and similarities between public attitudes and values of all involved parties will strengthen and improve the effectiveness of SD GFP's habitat and access programs.

## III. Management Approach & Descriptions of Ecoregions

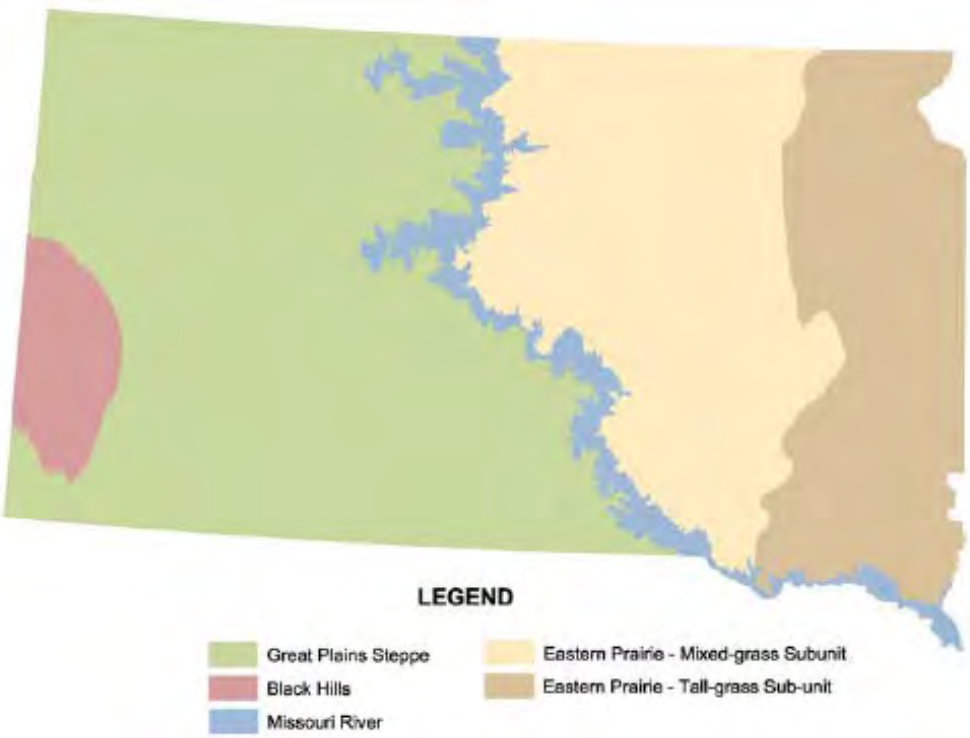
The South Dakota Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Plan was completed in September of 2005. The plan allows for funding to the state from the congressionally-appropriated State Wildlife Grants program and encourages cooperative planning and management of the state's wildlife resources. Approved by the USFWS and now referred to as the SD Wildlife Action Plan, the plan emphasizes an ecoregion and ecosystem approach to address conservation of all wildlife. The South Dakota Wildlife Action Plan is a large, detailed document. Copies are available on CD's upon request or a synopsis of the plan titled "South Dakota Wildlife Action Plan—The Big Picture" can be viewed at http://www.sdgfp.info/Wildlife/Diversity/Comp_Plan.htm.

Another important component for the groundwork of this strategic plan are principles outlined in both the Prairie Pothole Joint Venture (http://www.ppjv.org/) and the Northern Great Plains Joint Venture (http://www.northerngreatplainsjointventure.org/) implementation plans. Joint ventures are recognized regional delivery partnerships for bird conservation programs across North America. Though each is focused on a specific geographic area and has goals and objectives, joint ventures are a prime

example of how structured partnerships can successfully work on issues related to habitat development, management and protection.

Simply defined, ecoregions are areas with similar physical and biological attributes, each comprised of interacting ecosystems with varying biological communities. For the purpose of strategic planning and program design, the Division of Wildlife recognizes the value of landscape scale management. The following ecoregions found and described in the South Dakota Wildlife Action Plan were used in development of this plan (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Ecoregions of South Dakota as identified in the SD Wildlife Action Plan.




South Dakota has a wide variety of landscapes ranging from pine and spruce forested slopes high in the Black Hills where northern flying squirrels, elk and mountain lion reside to the grassland/wetland mosaics of the Prairie Coteau in eastern South Dakota where muskrats, mallards and northern harriers reside. Conservation planning benefits from recognizing these differences and similarities in land productivity, vegetative cover, native wildlife, and land use.

**Black Hills Ecoregion**: As a mostly forested mountain range rising some 4,000 feet above the surrounding grassland plain, the Black Hills stand out as an easily recognizable ecoregion. Ponderosa pine forests dominate this montane environment but other forests, grassland and riparian vegetation types are critically important to a variety of wildlife not present on the surrounding Great Plains. The Black Hills also provide the primary cold water fisheries resource in South Dakota. While roughly one-half of this landscape consists of public lands managed by various federal or state agencies, most of the riparian corridors along the Black Hills cold water streams and lower elevation grasslands and savannahs which traditionally served as big game winter range are privately owned. Timber management, impacts to riparian areas from

livestock and construction, hardrock mining (including the persisting impacts of past mining), instream flow issues, and land development all present challenges to conserving and enhancing the wildlife resources of the Black Hills.

**Great Plains Steppe Ecoregion:** Western South Dakota is a rolling upland plain punctuated by isolated buttes and incised by ancient drainage ways – the Grand, Moreau, Cheyenne, Bad, White and Keya Paha Rivers. Most of the soils are derived from sedimentary shales, mudstones and sandstones in an unglaciated, semi-arid environment. A small lobe of the Nebraska Sandhills also extends up into south central South Dakota. While extensive acreages are cultivated for wheat, sorghum, and alfalfa, much of this ecoregion remains as privately owned, native mixed-grass prairie vegetation that is managed as rangeland for livestock. Pronghorn, mule deer, sharp-tailed grouse and black-tailed prairie dogs are some of the native wildlife associated with this ecoregion. Native fish like channel catfish inhabit the river systems, while stock dams on intermittent drainages provide pond habitat for largemouth bass and other warm water fish species. Similar small impoundments create emergent wetland habitats that benefit waterfowl and other wetland wildlife. Crop production and tree planting, particularly in the eastern part of this ecoregion, when coupled with adequate grassland cover, have enabled ring-necked pheasant and greater prairie chicken to expand their populations in recent decades. Wildlife management challenges include the continued loss of grassland through conversion to cropland, providing adequate residual cover for upland nesting birds, and improving riparian health along rivers and streams. Wildlife habitat enhancement opportunities include wetland/stock pond creation for waterfowl and other wetland species, as well as grassland/riparian habitat management or development for upland wildlife species.

**Missouri River Ecoregion:** Bisecting South Dakota is the only large river in the state, which historically had a unique biota including several species that are now endangered such as the pallid sturgeon and the least tern. While the four Pick-Sloan reservoirs in South Dakota (Oahe, Sharpe, Francis Case, and Lewis and Clark) have replaced natural flows in the Missouri River, they have also created entirely new habitats and unique management issues. For planning purposes this ecoregion includes the river breaks and adjacent upland.

A management opportunity unique to this ecoregion is the corridor of public land acquired by the Army Corps of Engineers along the reservoirs and access to its wildlife and fisheries resources. While creating new fisheries habitat, including a deep, cold water lentic system for fishes like rainbow smelt and Chinook salmon, vast acreages of cottonwood forest and other riparian vegetation types were flooded by these reservoirs. Federal law requires mitigation for these losses, which has been and continues to be a major management challenge. Additional land management issues include urban and rural development along these public lands, increasing user conflicts and compromising wildlife management. Efforts to artificially restore cottonwood forest and other riparian habitats (in the absence of flooding) remain a challenge. In the absence of naturally occurring fires, native grasslands and deciduous shrublands in the river breaks are threatened by juniper invasion. As a highly controlled system of reservoirs where flood control, power generation, and downstream navigation have precedence, fisheries management is constrained by water levels and releases dictated and controlled by the Army Corps of Engineers.

**Eastern Prairie Ecoregion:** The landscapes of eastern South Dakota are the result of continental glaciers which left behind features like moraines, meltwater channels, glacial soils and thousands of depressional wetlands called prairie potholes. Rivers that once ran west to east now run north to south and into the Missouri River (with the exception of the northeastern-most corner of the state which drains to the Mississippi River or to Hudson Bay via the Red River). The area has a sub-humid climate, which enables more predictable crop yields than the semi-arid west. For this reason, the vast majority of the historic prairie vegetation has been converted to row crop and small grain agriculture. Prairie chicken range has been restricted to the central part of the state where more rangeland persists, and even pheasant can have a difficult time finding adequate grassland nesting cover in the most intensive agricultural areas. It is for these reasons that the Conservation Reserve Program (which converts cropland back to grassland) has been beneficial to upland game birds, waterfowl, and other grassland birds. Wetland drainage has eliminated roughly 35% of South Dakota's historic wetland acreage. Riparian woodlands suffer from grazing impacts as do streams and lakes from agricultural runoff. While edge species such as white-tailed deer, mourning doves, skunks and raccoons have benefited from this landscape conversion, most native species including waterfowl have historically declined. Wildlife habitat management often focuses on wetland and grassland restoration or grassland management to provide adequate nesting cover and offset the deleterious effects caused by monocultures of invasive plant species. Habitat enhancements also include food plots and woody cover plantings for pheasants and white-tailed deer, which help sustain over wintering populations of these resident species.

## IV. Private Lands Habitat & Access Programs—Past and Present

The Division of Wildlife's current private lands habitat and access efforts are comprised of two sub-programs: A) Wildlife Partners Program (WPP), and B) Wetland and Grassland Habitat Program. The WPP has concentrated on assisting landowners with the development of upland habitat, with a large proportion of projects occurring in eastern SD. Another component of WPP is the popular and successful Walk-In Area hunting access program. The Wetland and Grassland Habitat Program is utilized statewide with a focus on waterfowl habitat development. These habitat programs have evolved considerably over time, but have always been designed to complement federal Farm Bill programs.

### A. Wildlife Partners Program

#### 1. Program History

The Wildlife Partners Program has undergone several name changes and has been adapted to meet the changing needs of landowners to establish and enhance wildlife habitat on private land. Program elements have been strategically designed and adjusted to complement opportunities available through federal Farm Bill programs. The following historical review provides a summary and record of how the program evolved to where it is today.

Mid 1970's—Early 1980's

With record low pheasant populations and low harvest through the mid-1970's and early 1980's, the South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks, the South Dakota Pheasant Congress, (a nonprofit, non-governmental, private group of citizens established in 1975 who were dedicated to increasing pheasant populations) and other interested parties created a private land habitat program intended to address the problem of diminishing upland habitat in the state. An infusion of seed money in the amount of $250,000 from the South Dakota Legislature kicked off this new effort, entitled the Pheasant Restoration Program (PRP), and private landowners were sought as cooperators.

Across the state, cooperating landowners were paid by the Division of Wildlife to plant 20 to 40 acre blocks of dense nesting cover. The three plant species comprising the majority of these habitat blocks were alfalfa, sweet clover, and intermediate wheatgrass. Most contracts were for 5 years, and participating landowners were allowed to harvest the oats or other crops used as a nurse crop during the first year of planting.

The PRP continued through the early 1980's. At its peak, several hundred eastern South Dakota landowners planted approximately 800 blocks of dense nesting cover totaling 26,000 acres. While the overall impact to the state pheasant population through this program was quite small, supporters of the program heralded its success as a habitat demonstration project. Local pheasant populations were observed to have increased, and studies conducted by the Division of Wildlife showed good use of the areas by pheasants and other wildlife species for both nesting and winter cover.

Early 1980's to 1986

Initiated by the Division of Wildlife in the early 1980's, the Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program (SD WHIP) was another attempt to reach out to private landowners in an effort to provide incentives for improving various habitats for wildlife. The budget for this program was minimal, and cost-share was provided for various practices including woody plantings, waterfowl nesting structures, and habitat fencing. Contract payments were also quite small, usually averaging $50 to $100, limiting landowner participation. Pamphlets covering the SD WHIP were printed and distributed in an attempt to increase the use of the program by landowners, but cost-share remained low and unattractive to landowners.

1987-2004

In the spring of 1987, the Division of Wildlife unveiled an ambitious new private lands habitat program, the Pheasants for Everyone Program (PFE), which was intended to complement the federal government's Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). CRP was a new federal conservation program that allowed landowners across the state the opportunity to convert highly erodible cropland, wetlands and otherwise environmentally sensitive cropland to conservation uses like grassland habitat. Recognizing the need to complement the upland nesting cover benefits provided by CRP, the Division of Wildlife designed the PFE program to meet additional habitat objectives of interested producers and provide hunting access to the public.

The PFE program consisted of nine components:

1) ***Shelterbelt Maintenance***—An emphasis on the importance of woody habitat to increase winter survival, the creation of funding sources (Pheasant Restoration Stamp of 1977 and amended in 1988 to become the Habitat Stamp), and the origination of the CRP field windbreak practice provided the momentum for a surge of woody habitat projects. SD GFP made a per acre payment to mechanically or chemically maintain shelterbelts for a three year period, with the first payment made after the second growing season. New plantings and limited renovations were the primary woody habitat projects during this time period.

2) **Shelterbelt Renovation—**To improve the value of existing shelterbelts as dense winter cover and food for wildlife, cost-share rates up to 25% were provided, not to exceed $1,000 per cooperator per year.

3) ***Food and Cover Plots***—A habitat payment for food plots began in 1988 and has been the most popular habitat program offered by SD GFP. With CRP fields providing abundant nesting cover, the need for strategically located food plots to boost winter survival and meet demand for the hunting opportunities provided by food plots helped propel this program's success. Some producers were also provided with seed. If it was determined that sufficient food and cover remained, a producer could re-enroll the area for the second year without having to replant.

4) ***Habitat Fencing***—SD GFP reimbursed landowners the cost of fencing materials to protect specific habitat components from livestock. Producers were reimbursed up to 50% of the cost of the fencing project, with an annual limit of $1,000 per producer.

5) ***Wetland Restoration***—SD GFP reimbursed landowners 100% of the cost, up to $1,000, of restoring drained wetlands. This component was also used to help producers restore breached stock dams that provided good wetland habitat.

6) ***Pheasant Stocking***—SD GFP paid landowners and groups to raise and release pheasants. This program component was discontinued in 1990.

7) ***Predator Control***—SD GFP paid for the purchase and subsequent distribution of hundreds of live traps to private cooperators for trapping raccoons and skunks in the spring.

8) **Dense Nesting Cover—**To establish, maintain, or improve by inter-seeding prime undisturbed nesting habitat for wildlife, cost-share rates up to 25% were provided, not to exceed $1,000 per cooperator per year.

9) ***Walk-in Hunting Area Program***- Created as the access component of the Division of Wildlife's 1987 *Pheasants For Everyone* program, the Walk-In Area (WIA) program was first implemented in 1988. The primary objective of the WIA program is to provide public hunting access to private lands, with an emphasis on gaining hunter access to land enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program across South Dakota. Funding for the program came from license revenues and Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration federal aid funding has been used to partially fund the program since 1991. The

program is delivered by the local Conservation Officers and administration is handled by the Habitat Section staff in Pierre.

From 1988 through 1998, the WIA program implemented a payment schedule based on the number of acres a cooperator enrolled, regardless of habitat type or location within the state. The 1998 South Dakota Legislature created a $5 surcharge to be added to most hunting licenses sold after 1998. The surcharge was established in response to landowner concerns about wildlife depredation in combination with hunters' requests for more hunting access. Half of the surcharge was to be used for a wildlife depredation management program while the other half was to be used to fund additional and improved hunting access to private lands. In response, the Division of Wildlife modified the WIA program to enhance and expand WIA access in the western part of the state to improve hunting opportunities for big game and to increase WIA enrollment in the eastern part of the state where additional access for pheasant hunting was needed. Under the 1999 modified WIA plan, the state was divided into three zones (Figure 2) based on land values, pheasant hunting opportunities, and current WIA enrollments. The purpose of creating WIA zones was to encourage more participation in the program by offering higher payments and specific incentives where the department had limited success in enrolling land. At the same time, the Division of Wildlife wanted to partition parts of the state where historical rates had been adequate to secure hunting access on private lands. See Table 6 for WIA Payment Schedule used from 1999 to 2003.

To encourage additional enrollment in areas with pheasant hunting potential, two additional program options were added. The delayed opening option allowed cooperators to enroll land after November 1st at 50% of the established rate. The CRP seeding cost-share option provided cooperators with up-front payments of $5/acre (with annual payment) or $20/acre (with no annual payment) if they agreed to enroll their land into WIA for the duration of their CRP contract and not hay or graze under emergency CRP haying and grazing provisions. See Table 7 for WIA Seeding Cost-Share Program enrollment from 1999 to 2003.

While the program modifications made to the Walk-In Area Program in 1999 were fairly effective initially in securing additional access, access to pheasant hunting opportunities in eastern South Dakota was beginning to decline by 2003. Additionally, emergency CRP haying and grazing authorized in 2002 and managed CRP haying and grazing beginning in 2003 required the Division of Wildlife to look for more ways to encourage cooperators to leave CRP undisturbed. To improve access in locations with good to excellent pheasant hunting, additional incentives for enrolling permanent, undisturbed habitat like CRP in WIA were developed. A program that paid cooperators $1/acre base access payment and an additional $5/acre bonus payment for permanent habitat left undisturbed during the contract year was formulated. If the habitat was disturbed, then the $5/acre bonus payment was withheld on acres hayed or grazed. This payment system was available to cooperators in the eastern part of the state, as well as parts of western South Dakota with good to excellent pheasant hunting potential. Land in eastern South Dakota not containing permanent habitat (but still with sufficient habitat to harvest game throughout the hunting season) could be enrolled in WIA, with payments based on the $1/acre base access rate.

In western South Dakota, the Division of Wildlife was doing well leasing land for big game hunting and prairie grouse prior to 2004. Since these hunting activities require large tracts of land to offer a quality hunting experiences, hunting access payments were negotiated in a manner similar to those offered prior to 2004, but consideration was given to reflect the unique habitats, management and hunting opportunity available on the offered acres. A typical payment rate was approximately $1/acre. Big game units with high numbers of tags and areas where additional harvest was needed were targeted for enrollment. See Figure 3 for WIA distribution map of contracts enrolled in 2007.

In an effort to encourage additional enrollment in areas with pheasant hunting potential, the delayed opening option was offered and the CRP seeding cost-share option was replaced with a CRP Retention Bonus. Cooperators choosing to participate in the CRP Retention Bonus receive a one-time, up-front payment of $1/acre for each hunting season remaining in their CRP contract. Landowners are then required to enroll a CRP field for the duration of the CRP contract. In the event a WIA enrolled in a CRP Retention Bonus is terminated before the end of the CRP contract, the cooperator is required to pay back the entire Retention Bonus. See Table 8 for WIA Retention Bonus enrollment from 2004 to 2007.

Surveys were conducted and provided an analysis of hunting time, percent use and ratings of habitat quality and changes on WIA's between 1999 and 2005. Overall, percent of hunting time, percent use of Walk-In Areas and rating of habitat quality increased in 2005 from baseline data collected in 1999. Also, most hunters using Walk-In Areas felt those areas contained good habitat that was important to their overall hunting experience (Gigliotti 2006). See Tables 9-13 for Percent of Hunting Time for Residents, Nonresidents, Average Percent of Hunting Time for Big Game-Residents, Percent Use of Walk-In Areas, Rating of Habitat Quality and Importance of the Walk-In Area.

***Lower Oahe Waterfowl Access Program***-Created in 1998 at the direction of the 1998 Legislature, specifically SDCL 41-6-17.4 and House Concurrent Resolution 1002, the Division of Wildlife was given two primary directives: 1) provide new areas with quality opportunities for waterfowl hunters who cannot or will not pay a commercial fee and 2) to prioritize hunting leases with private landowners, recognizing the value of their contributions to the hunting heritage of South Dakota.

In exchange for new public access to waterfowl hunting opportunities, the Legislature authorized SD GFP to issue up to 2,000 nonresident 3-day waterfowl licenses valid only on private land in 4 counties along the Missouri River (Potter, Sully, Hughes, Stanley). Subsequent legislative action and changes in waterfowl licensing structure resulted in transfer of 500 of these special 3-day licenses to several northeast counties where they are valid on public and private lands; additionally, Lyman County was added to list of Missouri River counties. Revenue from these new licenses is to be used to lease public access to private lands for waterfowl hunting. The program has become a success with 35,239 acres enrolled by 2006 (Table 14). The Lower Oahe Waterfowl Access program provides pass-shooting opportunity (in strips and pits), decoy-hunting opportunities and other waterfowl hunting opportunity in areas adjacent to Pierre close to Lake Oahe. The access areas also provide some small game hunting opportunities

prior to the fall arrival of the geese. Delivery and administration is handled by Region II staff. See Figure 4 for SD GFP regional boundaries.

Surveys conducted to measure use, harvest and satisfaction within the decoy-only unit of the Lower Oahe Waterfowl Hunting Access Area found that hunter use and satisfaction increased steadily from 1998-2006 (Tables 15-16) (Gigliotti 2007).

## 2. Current Programs & Annual Budget

In 2004, the Pheasants for Everyone program name was changed to the current Wildlife Partners Program (WPP) due to confusion with the conservation organization Pheasants Forever, Inc. This coincided with the change to the shelterbelt maintenance program where cultivation contracts were phased out and new plantings and renovations were lumped into a single, more flexible woody habitat program with payments made the same year as the planting. See Table 18 and Figure 5 for WPP cooperators, acres and payments over time. See Figures 6-9 for respective WPP habitat project distribution.

Woody Habitat Program

The current woody habitat program includes cost-share for new plantings, renovations, ground preparation work, planting, and weed barrier fabric. Approved projects are funded the year of planting and/or installation at a 75% cost-share rate, with a maximum payment of $3,000, $4,000 or $5,000 per cooperator depending upon the size of the planting.

Food Habitat Plots

Food plot payments are $20 per acre with a maximum of 30 acres per cooperator per year (maximum of 10 acres per section); or $40 per acre per year for food plots located within a Walk-In Area.

Nesting Cover

Nesting cover projects are funded at 100% for grass and seeding. Plots 10-160 acres in size must remain undisturbed for 10 years and be planted in existing cropland. Currently, no cost-share is provided for projects enrolled in CRP.

Habitat Fencing

While interest in the habitat fencing practice has been limited to date, it is intended to assist cooperators in protecting habitat such as riparian areas and new plantings from livestock. A 100% cost-share for materials, up to a maximum of $1000 per cooperator per year, is available.

Walk-In Area

In eastern and western SD with good to excellent pheasant hunting potential, a $1 per acre access rate plus an additional $5 per acre bonus for undisturbed permanent habitat is available to cooperating landowners. Landowners willing to enroll CRP into WIA for the duration of the CRP contract are eligible for an additional $1 per acre per hunting season on CRP with good to excellent pheasant hunting potential. On non-permanent habitat, up to $1 per acre access rate has been established. A significant

milestone was reached in 2005 when over 1 million acres of WIA were enrolled across the state.

## B. Wetland and Grassland Habitat Program

### 1. Program History

The current Wetland and Grassland Habitat Program evolved primarily from a well established partnership with Ducks Unlimited (DU) that dates back to the mid-1980's. Ducks Unlimited's presence in South Dakota started in earnest in 1984 when they established an office in Bismarck, ND. Early cooperative projects between DU and SD GFP were completed through DU's Matching Aid to Restore States Habitat (MARSH) and Habitat USA programs. These programs focused primarily on public land acquisition and relatively large waterfowl habitat restoration and enhancement projects on public lands. However, by the late 1980's and early 1990's it became apparent that there was much opportunity for waterfowl oriented projects on private lands across South Dakota. During this period, the Lake Thompson Watershed Project (LTWP) was initiated and a portion of the Habitat Section budget was more formally dedicated to what is now known as the Wetland and Grassland Habitat Program. State Waterfowl Stamp (now known as the Migratory Bird Certification) revenues were informally recognized as the base of this budget. One Division of Wildlife staff position in the Pierre office was dedicated to coordinating these early efforts with DU, and with other partners involved with the LTWP.

In 1988, Governor Mickelson formally endorsed the Lake Thompson Watershed Project. This effort became an early flagship project under the North American Waterfowl Management Plan and was delivered by several South Dakota Prairie Pothole Joint Venture partners (SD GFP, USFWS, Ducks Unlimited, and National Wildlife Federation). After large scale flooding in the Lake Thompson basin during the mid-1980's, the LTWP was designed to address flood control, water quality, soil erosion, and wildlife habitat needs with suitable financial incentives for landowners. Programs focused on restoration and protection of wetlands, enhancement of private land habitat, acquisition of flooded private land from willing sellers, and management of small wetland units in the watershed. A Division of Wildlife position intended primarily to deliver this program within the LTWP area was created in 1992.

*LTWP SD GFP Private Land Habitat Program Practices (1992-1999)*

- Delayed Haying/Grazing
- Native Grass Plantings
- Dense Nesting Cover Plantings
- CRP/Waterbank Seeding Cost-share
- Grazing Systems
- Wetland Restorations
- Wetland Creations
- Cost-share Native Grass Drills with Conservation Districts & USFWS
- Nesting Structures

While land acquisition goals of the LTWP were essentially met, other initiatives and practices were undersubscribed by landowners within the project area. Consequently, the LTWP position was abandoned and moved to SD GFP's Huron Office in 2000. Duties of the position were expanded geographically across the eastern half of the state with the focus continuing to be wetland and grassland habitat work on private land.

Concurrently with the LTWP in the early 1990's, program staff began doing a considerable amount of wetland/pond development and restoration work across the state. There was much interest in the central and western part of the state where large intact grassland landscapes, either native rangeland or CRP, existed on private land. Partnerships with DU, USFWS, local NRCS offices and Conservation Districts were critical in the development and delivery of this emerging program through the 1990's. Several hundred wetland creation/pond projects have been completed on private land since the early 1990's.

The USFWS Partners for Fish & Wildlife Program, a voluntary private lands habitat restoration program, has been an effective avenue for SD GFP to put habitat dollars on the landscape with cooperating landowners. During the last seven years, SD GFP has partnered with the USFWS on approximately 222,482 acres of wetland/grassland habitat and provided $1,377,945 on site-specific projects (Table 19). See Figure 15 for project types and distributions across the state.

While the wetland creation/pond component of the program continues to be relatively popular in the central and western part of the state, grazing management and grassland establishment practices are becoming more important components of the program. Starting in 2002, there has been an aggressive effort to expand the private lands program to include more grassland oriented projects, namely grassland restorations and rotational grazing systems on private land. Interest in these practices has grown considerably in recent years, particularly in eastern South Dakota.

## 2. Current Programs & Annual Budget

Until 2006, the Wetland and Grassland Habitat Program was staffed by two biologists, one located in Pierre and one in Huron. Two more habitat biologist positions were dedicated to the program in the summer of 2006, one located in Huron and another in Rapid City.

Private Lands Projects and Other Contract Services

Cost-share payments are available for wetland restoration, wetland/pond development, grassland restoration and enhancements, riparian pasture, and farmable wetland program incentive projects on private lands. The combined annual budget for these habitat practices is $500,000. Funds are also used to meet SD GFP's match obligations to project partners and to secure engineering services and construction services for a very limited number of wetland/pond projects on public land (e.g. GPA's or USFS land). See Figures 10-14 for distribution of respective wetland and grassland habitat programs. See Table 20 for practices, acres, and dollars completed from 2002-2007.

Wetland Restorations

SD GFP provides up to 100% cost-share for wetland restoration projects involving removal of tile, plugging drainage ditches, and filling of dugouts located in wetland basins. In non-cropland settings, a payment of $150 per surface acre of wetlands restored is also provided. Wetland restorations necessary for compliance with NRCS Swampbuster provisions or other regulatory programs are not eligible for cost-share. Due to the availability of wetland restoration programs through USDA (e.g. CRP and WRP), or the USFWS (e.g. on easement lands), historically, SD GFP has not done many wetland restorations on private land.

Wetland Creations and Enhancements

Interest in wetland creations and enhancements remains high in the central and western part of the state, and in most cases is intended to assist landowners in developing livestock water while at the same time providing shallow water areas for wildlife, particularly breeding waterfowl. Such ponds typically have embankments less than 15 feet high and maximum water depths of 10 to 12 feet in the borrow area near the embankment. Deep dams designed primarily for fishery purposes are not a priority. Preferred sites have a high proportion of shallow water and are surrounded by well managed nesting cover (e.g. rangeland, pasture, or CRP). Important considerations in selecting a project site include: watershed size, acres of water created, cost, surrounding land use, and spillway sites not susceptible to erosion. Cost-share provided by SD GFP for embankment ponds is usually 2/3 of construction cost. However, cooperators with projects expected to provide notably high wildlife value and low cost per surface acre may receive additional incentives.

Upland Restorations

Upland grass restoration on previously cropped land has become one of the most utilized practices offered through this program. While some projects are done to provide undisturbed perennial nesting cover on lands managed primarily for wildlife, most cooperators are reseeding marginal cropland back to grass in order to incorporate reestablished grasslands into a rotational grazing system. Only cooperators willing to abide by recommended stocking rates and grazing practices (e.g. NRCS standards) are eligible. SD GFP provides up to 100% cost-share to purchase seed necessary to replant cropland back to grass (up to $100/acre).

Upland Enhancements—Grazing Management

A primary program objective is to encourage the establishment of better managed grasslands through sustainable grazing management systems that will benefit grassland dependent wildlife. SD GFP provides up to 100% cost-share, with a $20 per acre limit, to purchase permanent fencing materials (interior and exterior fences) to establish a managed or rotational grazing system. Priority is given to projects located within large tracts of intact grassland and/or those that are in close proximity to natural wetland complexes or a wetland restoration/creation project.

Riparian Pastures

In order to address continued and widespread poor riparian area conditions on pasture and rangelands across the state, SD GFP added a riparian pasture practice to the program in late 2006. The practice is intended to provide flexible alternatives to landowners hesitant to participate in riparian programs available through USDA. Riparian areas provide important habitat for many wildlife species statewide, and are

arguably the most important, yet most under-managed and even abused habitat in the state. Healthy riparian areas provide water and shelter for livestock and wildlife. They also filter runoff and capture sediment thereby improving water quality and aquatic habitat. SD GFP will provide up to 75% cost-share to create a riparian pasture that is managed to regenerate woody vegetation and herbaceous cover and stabilize stream banks while potentially increasing long-term forage production. Alternative water sources will also be eligible for 50% cost-share, up to $5,000, if the riparian area was the main source of water.

Farmable Wetland Program Incentive

Administered by the USDA Farm Service Agency, the Farmable Wetlands Program (FWP) is a continuous CRP practice available for eligible farmed wetlands. Wetlands 10 acres in size or smaller meeting cropping history requirements are eligible. However, USDA will only make annual rental payments on wetlands 5.0 acres or smaller in size. In an effort to boost potential interest in the program, SD GFP, in 2004, initiated a program to offer an additional incentive payment to landowners with contracts on wetlands larger than 5.0 acres in size that are ineligible for USDA payments. This one-time, up-front incentive is determined by the average annual rental rate of the three predominant soil types, the upland to wetland ratio, and the duration of the contract. Contracts that maximize the upland-to-wetland ratio, are in close proximity to other wetland complexes and upland nesting habitat, and those that restore wetland hydrology to the maximum extent possible receive priority.

Non-Cropped Wetland Restoration Initiative

Many programs exist for restoring cropped wetlands (CRP, WRP, etc.), but few programs exist that encourage landowners to restore non-cropped, drained wetlands yet still use these areas for livestock production. Recognizing the opportunity to restore hydrology and function of drained wetlands in grassland settings, SD GFP initiated a voluntary incentive program in late 2006 for landowners willing to restore wetland hydrology in such areas. Benefits to landowners include additional livestock water and forage production and restored habitat benefits to a host of wetland dependent wildlife. SD GFP provides 100% cost-share to restore wetland hydrology and a one-time payment of $150 per surface acre of wetland restored, with no limit per cooperator.

## V. Farm Bill History & Inventory

The conservation provisions of the Farm Bill are vitally important to private land habitat work in South Dakota, providing landowners a variety of programs to reduce soil erosion, improve water quality and provide high quality wildlife habitat. South Dakota's two largest industries, agriculture and tourism, generate approximately $4.4 billion annually and are heavily dependent on Farm Bill programs. While the Farm Bill authorized eight main conservation programs, five of these provide most of the wildlife habitat benefits to South Dakota. See Figures 16-23 for current USDA conservation programs acres enrolled in South Dakota and for a description of CRP conservation practices.

The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) was enacted in the 1985 Farm Bill and originally authorized CRP enrollment up to 45 million acres nationwide. Congress later capped the program at 36.4 million acres, but the 2002 Farm Bill raised the enrollment cap to 39.2 million acres. CRP enrollment in South Dakota has fluctuated from a high of 1.8 million acres in 1997 to 1.29 million acres as of October 1, 2007. As a result of expiring CRP contracts in the fall of 2007, SD lost 282,608 acres (USDA Farm Service Agency, http://content.fsa.usda.gov/crpstorpt/r1pracyr/sd.htm.). See Table 17 to compare CRP statistics before and after October 1, 2007.

CRP is the most widely recognized and successful conservation program in the last four Farm Bills. Because of the large blocks of undisturbed nesting habitat provided by CRP in 10 and 15 year contracts, the pheasant population in South Dakota is at a 35-year high with hunters harvesting approximately 1.9 million pheasants in 2006 (SD GFP, http://www.sdgfp.info/Wildlife/hunting/Pheasant/Stats.htm.). Pheasant hunting annually provides approximately $163.4 million dollars to the state's economy (SD GFP, http://www.sdgfp.info/Wildlife/hunting/Pheasant/Economics.htm.). The benefits of CRP in South Dakota also extend well beyond the state's border. CRP in South Dakota helps reduce sediment loads in streams that feed the Missouri River watershed, thereby reducing sediment and nutrients entering the Mississippi River and the Gulf of Mexico. CRP has helped the Prairie Pothole Region of Montana, North Dakota and South Dakota produce an additional 2.07 million ducks per year on only 7% of the land area—making this some of the most productive breeding waterfowl habitat in North America. This is extremely important because ducks produced in the Prairie Pothole Region are harvested in 44 states (Reynolds et al. 2001).

CRP's proven track record is very clear, but there is great concern that the future of CRP could be in jeopardy for many reasons including: 1) while CRP has been very popular with producers, it is now becoming less attractive because existing commodity programs and rising grain prices make it much more profitable to raise a crop on marginal land than to enroll that same land into CRP; 2) CRP rental rates have not kept pace with cash rental rates for croplands; 3) significant amounts of CRP will expire from 2007-2015; 4) federal budget priorities will likely affect many government programs, including conservation programs of the new Farm Bill; and 5) recent changes to the Environmental Benefits Index (EBI) used to score general CRP bids have made offers in the Prairie Pothole Region less competitive.

The Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) provides long-term easements (30-year and permanent) and restoration cost-share. WRP enrollment is legislatively capped at a maximum of 200,000 acres per year, but the actual enrollment is limited by annual funding. While not as attractive as CRP for enrolling wetlands in South Dakota, WRP has restored and protected approximately 30,940 acres in South Dakota, with the majority of these acres protected under perpetual easements.

The Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP) provides cost-share for producers who provide wildlife habitat improvements. WHIP has been popular with many producers, especially since any land is eligible for the program. Actual enrollment in WHIP, like WRP, is limited by annual funding. Projects that restore wetlands, riparian areas, native prairie, upland herbaceous cover, winter herbaceous cover, and winter woody cover are given priority for funding. From 2004-2006, 34,503 acres were enrolled in WHIP.

The Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) provides rental agreements and easements to producers who agree not to convert existing grasslands. This is especially important because grasslands are being converted to cropland at an alarming rate in South Dakota. According to FSA data, 330,894 acres of native grassland were converted to cropland in South Dakota between 2002 and 2007. The 2002 Farm Bill allows for 10, 15 and 30 year rental agreements as well as 30 year or permanent easements. Since GRP is statutorily capped at 2 million acres, the program was fully subscribed in the first few years the program was in existence. Currently, in South Dakota about 62,335 acres have been enrolled in GRP.

The Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) was originally authorized in the 1996 Farm Bill and designed to provide financial and technical assistance to farmers and ranchers to implement practices to address environmental concerns on their land. EQIP provides up to 75% cost-share to encourage farmers and ranchers to carry out management practices that otherwise might not be implemented. Limited resource producers and beginning farmers and ranchers may be eligible for cost-share up to 90%. In South Dakota, most EQIP contracts focus on water quality issues (e.g. non-point source runoff and nutrient management systems for confined feeding operations) and grazing management. Currently, 3,796,341 acres are under EQIP contract in South Dakota.

The Conservation Security Program (CSP) was authorized under the 2002 Farm Bill to reward producers for practices already implemented on lands under production. Due to limited funding, CSP is currently being administered on a rotating watershed basis, with South Dakota only having five watersheds in the program since 2005. Due to the short tenure of the program in South Dakota, limited information is available on its wildlife benefits in South Dakota.

## VI. Future Private Lands Habitat Programs

### A. Farm Bill & Other Influences

The new Farm Bill will have a great influence on the scope and direction of future private lands habitat programs in South Dakota. The Farm Bill is currently being debated and the final outcome will undoubtedly be influenced by budget priorities, high commodity prices, and a growing interest in biofuel production. Right now, it is difficult to predict what conservation programs will exist in the new Farm Bill, but is highly likely that there will be less funding for conservation programs than was found in the 2002 Farm Bill.

Other factors that may influence future SD GFP private lands habitat programs include: 1) priorities of conservation partners at the local, state, federal and non-governmental levels; 2) internal and external funding sources; 3) SD GFP organizational structure and staff dedicated to delivery; 4) shift in public values and beliefs; 5) willingness of private landowners to participate in voluntary habitat programs; and 6) improvements in scientific knowledge.

## B. Long-Term Wildlife Habitat and Access Leasing Program

The Big Bend and Oahe projects, carried out as part of the Pick-Sloan Missouri River Basin Program, inundated over 423,000 acres of wildlife habitat. Title VI Legislation established a Mitigation Trust Fund to be used by the State of South Dakota for the restoration of terrestrial wildlife habitat. Beginning in the fall of 2008, the Mitigation Trust Fund is expected to capitalize. A portion of the interest generated from this fund may be used for long-term wildlife habitat and access leases on private land. The goal of this program is to lease private lands for quality wildlife habitat management and public access.

Since riparian habitats (both prairie and woodland types) were lost when the Missouri River dams were constructed, large riparian habitat leases will be targeted under this leasing program. Wetlands and large blocks of upland native habitats will also be given priority status as well. However, all private lands with habitat potential will receive consideration. Habitat development practices designed to enhance wildlife production on these leases will be important components of the program. Practices used will vary widely depending on existing conditions, but a variety of practices will be available that will complement or improve the riparian and upland habitats under lease, regardless of location within South Dakota.

The Long-Term Wildlife Habitat and Access Leasing Program will include a cost-share component to assist producers with installing practices to improve wildlife habitat and allow public access to wildlife habitat for outdoor recreational opportunities. There will also be an incentive payment component to offset the loss of agricultural production due to habitat enhancement or protection. These two components will work in concert to maximize wildlife habitat benefits and outdoor recreational value.

The cost-share component of the Long-Term Wildlife Habitat and Access Leasing Program will be similar to many existing SD GFP private lands programs. Types of cost-share available for landowners include, but are not limited to: native and dense nesting cover grass plantings, woody plantings, food plots, wetland restoration, fencing (exclusion fences and cross fences) and water development for grazing management. SD GFP will pay 100% of the cost for practices that are solely designed to enhance wildlife production. For practices that provide dual livestock and wildlife benefits (such as grazing management and water development to assist with grazing management), the producer will split the costs at negotiated rates with SD GFP. Payments for cost-shared practices will be paid by SD GFP after the practice is installed.

In order to manage lands for high quality wildlife habitats, agricultural production may be decreased on some lands under contract. Wherever this occurs, GFP may compensate producers for the resulting loss of income. Land rental rates will be determined using the annual average county rental rates for grazing and croplands provided by the South Dakota Agricultural Statistics Service. This will be reviewed and adjusted annually to ensure fair compensation is maintained throughout the life of the agreement.

Grazing land
In areas where grazing land is converted solely to wildlife habitat with livestock exclusion, SD GFP may pay the producer on an annual basis. In areas where the grazing is managed to increase wildlife production potential, SD GFP will negotiate compensation with the producer. Payments will be made following the fall hunting seasons.

Cropland
On cropland or hay land that is removed from production and placed into wildlife production, the producer may be paid the average county cropland rental rate as published by the SD Agricultural Statistics Service. Payments will be made following the fall hunting seasons.

Wetlands
Privately owned natural wetlands are another habitat type that will receive high priority under the program. Wherever wetlands can be restored, protected or enhanced, lease payments may be made by SD GFP to the producer. Any practices implemented to enhance or restore a previously drained or degraded wetland will be paid for in full by SD GFP.

Access
As written in the legislation, the lands under lease will be available for hunting, fishing and other outdoor recreational purposes as part of the negotiated agreement. SD GFP will provide maps and specific information on locations and access for the public. Access will be subject to a "compatible use" test and will not detract from the wildlife habitat goals and objectives. In some instances, it may be necessary to restrict access to some sites to protect threatened or endangered species during critical times of the year or to protect areas with archeological value. In these instances, the public will be advised as to the justification and the location of any closures and will be given the ability to provide feedback prior to lease approval. The Long-Term Leasing Program funding may also be used to purchase easements or rights-of-way that traverse private property to public lands.

## VII. Issues, Challenges & Opportunities

### A. General

#### 1. The Farm Bill
The Farm Bill will have the greatest impact on wildlife populations in South Dakota over the next several years. The future form and funding of USDA programs such as CRP, WHIP, WRP, EQIP and CSP will in large measure dictate the direction and focus of all SD GFP private lands programs. As an agency, it is in our best interest to develop strategies to complement programs included in the Farm Bill.

#### 2. Private lands program objectives and delivery.
The goal of our private lands habitat program is to maintain or increase wildlife populations by improving their respective habitats. Effective and efficient delivery of these programs is vital to achieving these ends. Within the Division of Wildlife, a clear

and concise work direction must be provided to the regional staff, private lands biologists, and conservation officers in order to improve the consistency, delivery, and landowner participation levels of the programs. Local involvement by Division of Wildlife employees will play a significant role in dictating the success of our private lands program. Coinciding with this local level involvement, a synergistic relationship between Division of Wildlife staff, Pheasant Forever Farm Bill Biologists, and other partners must exist to facilitate effective program delivery.

**3. Inconsistency in habitat program eligibility guidelines.**

Consistency in program eligibility guidelines is important to fair delivery of private lands habitat programs. Guidelines for our private lands habitat programs should be regularly scrutinized and evaluated to ensure efficient, fair and equitable program delivery.

**4. Pressures influencing habitat loss.**

Accelerating levels of habitat loss have the potential to adversely affect many wildlife populations in South Dakota. Specific issues contributing to this loss include: (1) Farm Bill subsidies and incentives; (2) emphasis on biofuels; (3) urban sprawl; (4) changing crop genetics; (5) degradation, fragmentation, and conversion of native grasslands; (6) invasive species, (7) loss of wetlands and riparian areas; (8) pollution; and (9) increasing property values/taxes. As habitats are lost, it becomes increasingly difficult to effectively manage wildlife populations.

**5. Commercialization of wildlife.**

Commercialized hunting operations have been present in South Dakota for many years and will continue to have an impact on wildlife populations, habitats, and access. An increase in commercialized hunting operations has great potential to negatively impact the agency's private lands and access programs. The most immediate impact of the increase in size and scope of fee hunting operations may be reduced public access.

**6. Landowner demographics.**

Rapidly changing South Dakota landowner demographics are currently having a great impact on private lands management and consequently have the potential to influence wildlife populations. The general aging of the farming community and increase in farm size is reducing the "tie" or connection to the land. In many areas, traditional family farms are being replaced by agri-business where more intensive farming practices have resulted in significantly decreased habitat. On the other hand, rising numbers of recreation or non-traditional land buyers seeking a place to hunt or otherwise enjoy the outdoors are becoming increasingly important in South Dakota. The recent surge in resident and non-resident recreational landowners has created many thousands of acres of quality habitat, but will likely reduce traditional access to wildlife populations by the general public.

**7. Ensuring the ability of SD GFP to provide hunting access to private lands.**

The Walk-In Area program has been an extremely successful way to increase access to quality hunting lands in South Dakota. The intrinsic flexibility of this program has in large part fueled its popularity. As commercial fee hunting operations and recreational properties increase across the landscape, it is important to continue annual evaluations of hunter access programs to maintain this important hunting opportunity. Items to

monitor include payment rates, hunter satisfaction, and quality of areas enrolled in the program.

**8. Biofuels and genetically modified crops.**

Currently, ethanol is recognized primarily as a fuel additive but some hope to utilize both ethanol and biodiesel to reduce our dependency upon foreign oil. However, the ethanol and biodiesel industry has the potential to create market forces that make CRP less attractive for enrolling marginal cropland and place additional pressure on our native grassland landscapes. The current rate of construction and expansion of corn-based ethanol facilities is growing rapidly across the country. As of January 2, 2008, South Dakota currently had seventeen ethanol plants in operation or under construction in Aberdeen, Aurora, Big Stone City, Chancellor, Groton, Hudson, Huron, Loomis, Marion, Meckling, Redfield, Rosholt, Scotland, Watertown and Wentworth. Ethanol plants are also being considered in Belle Fourche, Sherman and Wagner (South Dakota Corn, http://www.sdcorn.org).

Cellulosic ethanol is a biofuel produced from cellulose, a naturally occurring carbohydrate polymer found in plant cell walls. Although technology may be a few years away from breaking cellulose down into sugars in an economical way, cellulosic ethanol has the potential to provide a fuel source with minimal input costs and may provide beneficial habitat if cropland is seeded to grass. The Farm Bill and the Energy Bill will have a direct impact on the future of biofuels and South Dakota's wildlife resources.

Significant advancements in crop genetics and herbicide technology, namely the development of drought and herbicide resistant varieties, have indirectly caused accelerated conversion of native grassland to cropland. Unfortunately, much of this grassland habitat loss has occurred in the Missouri Coteau region of South Dakota—one of the most productive landscapes for breeding waterfowl remaining on the continent. Further development of genetically modified crops will undoubtedly provide new opportunities for agriculture to expand and will further challenge wildlife and habitat managers.

**9. Current budget and potential funding sources for private lands.**

The primary funding source for the Division of Wildlife's private land habitat programs is hunting license dollars. Conservation programs available through the federal Farm Bill have placed numerous acres of habitat on marginal cropland acres across South Dakota. As a result of prospering wildlife populations, especially the ring-necked pheasant, hunting license sales have provided adequate funding to support habitat programs that complement CRP and meet the management objectives of cooperating landowners.

Even with the reliable funding through traditional sources, SD GFP should explore and consider alternative sources to meet the demand of cooperating landowners and ensure that adequate habitat requirements are met on private lands for both game and non-game species.

## 10. Public outreach and education regarding habitat programs and the importance of South Dakota's unique habitats.

Informing the general public and landowners of the importance of South Dakota's unique landscapes, wildlife, and habitat obviously plays a critical role in meeting our agency's mission. Although SD GFP has had a private lands habitat program for decades, many landowners are not aware of the program, and more importantly, do not fully understand why we provide some of the cost-share and technical assistance that is available.

The advent of the Internet has provided an unlimited, inexpensive, and efficient opportunity for information exchange and communication with our constituents. The private lands habitat program webpage (*www.sdgfp.info/Wildlife/privatelands/Index.htm*) is informative and there are endless opportunities to present useful information to the public. Recent efforts through SD GFP sponsored landowner workshops and the Landowners Matter newsletter have been great outreach tools. Other potential opportunities exist through the *SD Conservation Digest*, technical assistance literature, electronic newsletters, project tours and pod-casts.

## 11. Fostering and expanding relationships with our conservation partners.

To complete habitat projects on private lands and make recommendations for federal agricultural policies, SD GFP participates with other conservation partners on certain projects and with varying levels of involvement. Although not a complete list, examples of partners include: FSA and NRCS, SD Association of Conservation Districts, US Fish & Wildlife Service, Pheasants Forever, Ducks Unlimited, The Nature Conservancy, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, National Wild Turkey Federation, Northern Prairies Land Trust, SD Grassland Coalition and the SD Parks & Wildlife Foundation. In addition, SD GFP is an active member of numerous "umbrella groups", such as the Prairie Pothole and Northern Great Plains Joint Ventures, Northern Great Plains Working Group, SD Conservation Alliance, Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies and the Midwest Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies.

Although each conservation partner has its own mission, all recognize the importance of maintaining and creating wildlife habitat on private lands, while assisting landowners to meet their management objectives. It is imperative that SD GFP continues to seek new opportunities with our conservation partners to meet both the challenges and opportunities of working with the landowners of South Dakota.

## 12. Matching services to the landscape and landowner objectives.

South Dakota is widely known for its unique landscapes and wildlife populations that thrive under proper land management. Land management decisions are primarily driven by economics, although SD landowners have always shown a strong interest for incorporating practices that are beneficial to wildlife.

Current SD GFP habitat programs are designed for statewide implementation, with past and present program delivery following landowner interest. With completion of the South Dakota Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Plan in 2006, a critical evaluation of our current programs and other services could identify the need to target specific geographic areas to meet certain goals, establish new priorities for the wisest use of funds, or lead to modifications of certain habitat programs. The difficult task for wildlife managers will be to identify and prioritize resource needs and to find innovative ways to make programs that address those needs attractive to landowners.

**13. Potential impacts of global climate change.**

Changes in global climate will require wildlife and habitat managers to be adaptable. Changes in precipitation patterns, growing seasons, and species distributions may have great impacts on habitats and their associated wildlife populations. Issues to monitor include: 1) invasive species; 2) changes in wetland hydrology; 3) changes in agricultural practices; 4) expansion/contraction of individual species range; and 5) extirpation of certain species sensitive to climate change.

## B. Ecoregion Specific

Black Hills

- Current development and increasing human population are reducing habitat for many wildlife species.
- The Black Hills have a limited private land base. Most private lands are located in valleys and along riparian areas. This reality provides SD GFP an opportunity to have a positive impact on wildlife in the Black Hills.
- Many land purchases are now being made by persons who want to improve fisheries habitat and/or conduct bank improvement in streams. Modification of the current wetland habitat program could allow for fisheries based improvements on streams or fish pond construction.
- Continuous and/or overstocked grazing of privately held riparian areas has degraded riparian and instream habitat.
- Continued suburban development in meadows and riparian areas continues to fragment habitat on private lands.
- Continued demand on surface and groundwater resources by development and municipalities that will have potential adverse impacts on water availability for wildlife/fish during dry periods.

Great Plains Steppe

- Recreational and non-traditional landowners are becoming more common across western South Dakota. Many of these landowners desire technical assistance from SD GFP and appreciate any cost-share assistance available. Preventing well intended but misguided habitat developments is an issue that deserves some program attention.
- Rising grain commodity prices are providing a greater incentive for producers to convert semi-arid rangeland to cropland. From 2002-2007, FSA reported that 58,425 acres of native grasslands were converted to cropland in 22 western South Dakota counties. These landscape conversions negatively impact most native wildlife species.

- The loss of CRP acres beginning in 2007 and the potential negative impact on wildlife populations, along with the challenge to promote habitat development and public hunting access.
- Traditional season-long grazing in large pastures continues to adversely affect habitat for many species. Traditional use of stream/creek bottoms as primary wintering and calving areas continues to degrade many riparian areas and adversely affect a variety of wildlife species.

Missouri River

- New land management efforts, i.e. Title VI, on the Missouri River corridor may allow SD GFP to interact more with adjacent landowners regarding public access/use and habitat management (e.g. grazing management).
- Increased suburban and rural development will continue to result in habitat loss and conflicts with users of adjacent public lands.

Eastern Prairie

- The conversion of native grassland habitat is occurring at an alarming rate. From 2002-2007, FSA reported that 272,469 acres of native grasslands were converted to cropland in the Prairie Pothole Region of South Dakota (see Figure 24).
- The loss of CRP acres beginning in 2007 and the potential negative impact on wildlife populations, along with the challenge to promote habitat development and public hunting access.
- Recreational landowners are becoming more common. Many of these landowners desire technical assistance from SD GFP and appreciate any cost-share assistance available.
- Traditional season-long grazing continues to adversely affect tall and mixed grass habitats for many species. Traditional use of stream/creek bottoms as primary wintering and calving areas continues to degrade many riparian areas and adversely affect a variety of wildlife species.
- Potential exists for water based recreational development cost-share programs.

## VIII. Strategic Planning—Goals, Objectives & Strategies

**GOAL #1**

In cooperation with private landowners, manage, conserve, and restore habitat to sustain diverse wildlife populations.

**Statewide Objective #1**

A. By 2010, increase by 5% South Dakota residents' support for wildlife (native species & diversity) and healthy ecosystems (habitat) from baseline levels surveyed in 2004.

B. By 2010, increase by 10% public awareness of and support for SD GFP's role in protecting wildlife diversity and healthy ecosystems from baseline levels surveyed in 2004.

C. By 2010, increase public awareness of the importance of specific types of wildlife habitat on private lands in South Dakota and develop specific evaluation measures of these parameters.

Statewide Strategies

1. Develop and distribute detailed information to improve public knowledge of wildlife biology in the following areas: 1) pheasant habitat/population dynamics, 2) wetland habitat/waterfowl population dynamics, 3) riparian habitat/wildlife and fisheries population dynamics, 4) big game habitats/population dynamics, 5) ecosystem function/fish and wildlife population dynamics, and 6) native plant communities and their associated wildlife species.
2. Provide one article related to wildlife habitat on private land for each quarterly Landowners Matter Newsletter.
3. Provide updated information for the landowner contact packets distributed by the Wildlife Conservation Officers.
4. Incorporate an electronic bi-monthly newsletter, The Habitat Connection, into the Private Lands Habitat Program's webpage and make available via e-mail for subscribers.
5. Include a one page section in the Conservation Digest titled "Habitat Notes".
6. Compose pod-casts as needed to inform landowners on important habitat issues.

**Sub-objective #1—Black Hills Ecoregion**

1. Increase understanding of the importance of improved stewardship of riparian areas and meadows, not only to fish and wildlife, but also to long-term sustainable use of such lands for livestock production.

Black Hills Ecoregion Strategies

1. By January 2009, with assistance from rangeland management experts (e.g. SDSU Extension Service and NRCS staff), develop educational materials regarding grazing management strategies that prioritize long term sustainable use of riparian areas and meadows for livestock production, while providing improved wildlife habitat
2. By January 2009, develop and deliver a rancher workshop program that focuses primarily on meeting wildlife habitat management goals through improved grazing management on private land, with special emphasis on riparian area management and value of grazing practices that result in improved nesting cover (e.g. rest-rotation).

**Sub-objective #2—Great Plains Steppe Ecoregion**

1. Increase understanding of the importance of improved stewardship of native rangelands, other pasturelands and riparian areas, not only to wildlife, but also to long-term sustainable use of such lands for livestock production.

Great Plains Steppe Ecoregion Strategies

1. By January 2009, with assistance from rangeland management experts (e.g. SDSU Extension Service and NRCS staff), develop educational materials regarding grazing management strategies that prioritize long-

term sustainable use of native rangelands for livestock production, while providing improved wildlife habitat.

2. By January 2009, develop and deliver a rancher workshop program that focuses primarily on meeting wildlife habitat management goals through improved grazing management on private land, with special emphasis on riparian area management and value of grazing practices that result in improved nesting cover (e.g. rest-rotation).

**Sub-objective #3—Missouri River Ecoregion**

1. Increase public awareness of historic Missouri River riparian habitat and SD GFP's attempt to mitigate habitat losses from main stem dam inundation of these habitats.

Missouri River Ecoregion Strategies

1. By January 2009, in cooperation with other conservation partners, educate landowners and general public by promoting the importance of these historic habitat communities.

**Sub-objective #4—Eastern Prairie**

1. Increase understanding of the importance of wetland and grassland habitats on a continental scale for wetland and grassland dependent species (i.e. breeding waterfowl, neo-tropical migrants, shorebirds and upland species).

Eastern Prairie Ecoregion Strategies

1. By January 2009, in cooperation with other conservation partners, develop educational materials pertaining to native plant communities and habitat types, while demonstrating the connection between historic disturbance regimes (i.e. fire and grazing) and how they shaped the tall and mixed grass prairie landscape.
2. By January 2009, with assistance from rangeland management experts (e.g. SDSU Extension Service and NRCS staff), develop educational materials regarding grazing management strategies that prioritize long-term sustainable use of native rangelands for livestock production, while providing improved wildlife habitat.
3. By January 2009, develop and deliver a rancher workshop program that focuses primarily on meeting wildlife habitat management goals through improved grazing management on private land, with special emphasis on riparian area management and value of rotational and rest-rotation grazing management.

**Statewide Objective #2**

Increase development and enhancement of priority habitat types and projects within the four ecoregions on private lands across the state.

Statewide Strategies

1. Work with Conservation Districts, U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, National Wild Turkey Federation, Rocky Mountain Elk

Foundation, Ducks Unlimited, Pheasants Forever, The Nature Conservancy and other conservation partners to promote programs and generate funding to be used as additional incentives and cost-share resources to complete habitat projects.

2. Promote SD GFP, federal Farm Bill, and other agency and conservation organizations' habitat programs.
3. Work with SD GFP Commission, SD GFP Department Secretary and Division of Wildlife Administration to maintain or increase program budgets and staffing levels for the private lands habitat program.
4. Develop and implement programs to complement new Farm Bill habitat programs as needed.

**Sub-objective #1—Black Hills Ecoregion**

1. Increase landowner participation in the improvement of native rangelands, riparian areas, and forests, not only to benefit wildlife and fisheries, but also to ensure the long-term sustainable use of such lands for livestock production.
2. Identify priority habitat areas where riparian hardwood habitat can be created or restored through protection (i.e. fencing) or planting and establishment practices.

Black Hills Ecoregion Strategies

1. Riparian Habitat (complete 5 projects for a total of 60 acres per year)
2. Upland/Grassland Enhancement through grazing management (complete 5 new projects for a total of 1,000 acres per year)
3. By 2009, develop a program component to enhance hardwood and meadow habitat with prescribed fire or mechanical pine thinning with the goal of completing at least 2 projects per year totaling 20 acres.
4. By 2009, develop a program component to address instream and/or impoundment-construction with fisheries emphasis.

**Sub-objective #2—Great Plains Steppe Ecoregion**

1. Increase landowner participation in implementing grazing stewardship practices, including managed grazing systems, designed to measurably benefit wildlife and long-term sustainable use of native rangelands for livestock production.
2. With assistance from rangeland management experts (e.g. SDSU Extension Service and NRCS staff), develop a stewardship and managed grazing system cost-share program tailored to western SD rangelands and wildlife, with a special component emphasizing improved riparian area management and value of rotational and rest-rotation grazing systems.
3. Identify priority habitat areas where riparian hardwood habitat can be created or restored through protection (i.e. fencing) or planting and establishment practices.

Great Plains Steppe Ecoregion Strategies

1. Lease 8,000 new acres per year for habitat enhancement and hunting access through Title VI appropriations beginning in 2009.

2. Riparian Habitat (complete 10 new projects for a total of 200 acres per year)
3. Wetland Creation and Enhancement (complete 20 new projects for a total of 80 acres per year)
4. Upland/Grassland Enhancement through grazing management (complete 10 new projects for a total of 8,000 acres per year)
5. Upland/Grassland Seedings (complete 5 new projects on 625 acres per year)
6. Food Habitat Plots (complete 10 new projects on 200 acres per year in priority pheasant counties)
7. Woody Habitat (complete 5 new projects on 15 acres per year in priority pheasant counties)
8. Develop program for dual-purpose impoundments for wildlife and fisheries by 2009.

**Sub-objective #3—Missouri River Ecoregion**

1. Incorporate land management practices that will enhance adjacent upland habitats benefiting grassland wildlife, as well as reduce erosion and river sedimentation.
2. Identify priority habitat areas where bottomland hardwood habitat can be created or restored through protection (i.e. fencing) or planting and establishment practices.

Missouri River Ecoregion Strategies

1. Lease 1,000 new acres per year for habitat enhancement and hunting access through Title VI appropriations beginning in 2009.
2. Upland/Grassland Enhancement through grazing management (complete 2 new projects on 500 acres per year)
3. Identify priority habitat areas where juniper encroachment can be managed by prescribed fire or other management tools (complete 2 new projects on 200 acres per year)
4. Woody Habitat (complete 5 new projects on 25 acres per year)

**Sub-objective #4—Eastern Prairie Ecoregion**

1. Increase awareness of the importance of wetland/grassland mosaics for tall and mixed grass prairie wildlife species.
2. Focus habitat development to provide necessary habitat requirements to sustain current pheasant populations, without further fragmenting existing grassland habitat.
3. Continue wetland/grassland projects that will provide quality nesting habitat for waterfowl and other wetland/grassland dependent birds in high priority areas designated at state and national levels.
4. Identify priority habitat areas where bottomland hardwood habitat can be created or restored through protection (i.e. fencing) or planting and establishment practices.
5. In cooperation with existing and new conservation partners, develop a prescribed fire program to provide technical and financial assistance to interested landowners as a grassland management tool.

Eastern Prairie Ecoregion Strategies

1. Wetland Restorations (complete 15 new projects on 75 acres per year)
2. Wetland Creation (complete 5 new projects on 25 acres per year)
3. Upland/Grassland Seedings (complete 25 projects on 1,250 acres per year)
4. Upland/Grassland Enhancement through grazing management (complete 20 new projects on 6,400 acres per year)
5. Woody Habitat (complete 75 new projects on 165 acres per year)
6. Food Habitat Plots (complete 50 new projects on 75 acres per year)
7. Riparian Habitat (complete 5 new projects on 50 acres per year)
8. Lease 1,000 new acres per year through Title VI appropriations beginning in 2009.
9. Develop program for dual-purpose impoundments for wildlife and fisheries by 2009.

**Statewide Objective #3**

Promote enrollments in EQIP, WHIP, WRP and GRP such that 2006 statewide inventory levels are maintained through 2012. Promote an enrollment of 1 million acres of high quality CRP acres (acres unhayed or ungrazed) annually through 2012.

Statewide Strategies

1. Participate in on-going policy discussions affecting Farm Bill program devolvement at the local, state and federal levels to influence legislation.
2. Seek new opportunities within Farm Bill programs (like the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program—CREP) for critical watersheds within South Dakota to target CRP enrollments in areas of highest need.
3. Foster grass roots efforts (e-mail trees, working groups and coalitions) to maintain support for Farm Bill programs with landowners, sportsmen and others with an interest in habitat on private lands.
4. Enter into partnerships with other government entities and non-governmental organizations (NGO's) to provide technical assistance to landowners and delivery of Farm Bill programs that promote the development and protection of fish and wildlife habitat.
   A. Maintain existing partnerships with Pheasants Forever, NRCS and SD GFP to fund 7 Farm Bill Biologists in NRCS Offices to assist private landowners with technical assistance.
   B. Expand the existing partnership to fund eight (8) Farm Bill Biologists by 2009 and fund 2 additional Farm Bill Biologists by 2011.
   C. Look for new opportunities with NGO's to create new partnerships in Great Plains Steppe and the Black Hills ecoregions to deliver technical assistance for Farm Bill programs.
3. Work with interested parties to create new programs and practices (e.g. Duck Nesting Habitat Initiative and State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement) to address unique habitat needs not currently being met or to increase CRP acres.
4. Continue on-going work with USDA to review practices and programs to benefit fish and wildlife habitat on private lands.
5. As needed, modify SD GFP private land habitat programs to complement USDA Farm Bill programs.

## GOAL #2

Provide the public with high quality opportunities to access fish and wildlife resources on private land.

**Objective #1**

By 2012, increase the average time spent on Walk-In Areas for all species hunted by 5 percent over those in 2005 (use Hunter Evaluation of the 2005 Walk-In Areas survey as a benchmark).

Strategies

1. Focus access efforts to maximize hunting opportunity on habitat created by CRP or state, Farm Bill and federal private land habitat programs.
2. Enroll 10,000 new acres per year of private land for wildlife habitat management and access starting in 2008.
   - A. Great Plains Steppe: Lease 8,000 new acres per year of private land for wildlife access starting in 2008.
   - B. Missouri River: Lease 1,000 new acres per year of private land for wildlife access starting in 2008.
   - C. Eastern Prairie: Lease 1,000 new acres per year of private land for wildlife access starting in 2008.
3. Form a WIA Habitat Evaluation Team with broad division representation (e.g. habitat, game, and region staff) to evaluate habitat quality on WIA's using random spot checks on at least 5 percent of WIA contracts annually.
4. Monitor hunter perception of habitat quality using future Hunter Evaluations of WIA surveys. If surveys indicate a decline in quality, then examine program guidelines, evaluate individual contracts and remove from program if land does not meet program guidelines.
5. Use the Access Committee to annually evaluate the Walk-In Area program guidelines to ensure that incentives offered to cooperators are sufficient, cost-effective, and attractive to landowners to secure high quality access.
6. Maintain current efforts to respond to hunter complaints on specific Walk-In Areas.
7. Look for new opportunities and create new programs to secure additional access that cannot be secured using the WIA program.

**Objective #2**

Maintain at least an 80% satisfied or less than 10% dissatisfied rating for all hunters using the decoy-only Lower Oahe Waterfowl Hunting Access Area.

Strategies

1. Lease private lands as appropriate along the Missouri River to provide public waterfowl hunting.
2. Continue to work with current cooperators to find ways to enhance access by adding trails, pits, and other enhancements to increase hunter use.
3. Seek new ways to enhance hunter access in areas other than those immediately adjacent to Lake Oahe.

4. Continue to complete periodic evaluations (hunter satisfaction and use) of the decoy-only areas, and initiate new evaluation of other components of the Lower Oahe Waterfowl Hunting Access Area Program.

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# LIST OF ACRONYMS

| | |
|---|---|
| CCRP | Continuous Conservation Reserve Program |
| CO | Conservation Officer |
| CP | Conservation Practice |
| CRP | Conservation Reserve Program |
| CSP | Conservation Security Program |
| DOW | Division of Wildlife |
| DU | Ducks Unlimited |
| EBI | Environmental Benefit Index |
| EQIP | Environmental Quality Incentive Program |
| FSA | Farm Service Agency |
| FWP | Farmable Wetlands Program |
| GPA | Game Production Area |
| GRP | Grassland Reserve Program |
| LTWP | Lake Thompson Watershed Project |
| MARSH | Matching Aid to Restore States Habitat |
| NGO | Non-Governmental Organization |
| NRCS | Natural Resources Conservation Service |
| PFE | Pheasants Everyone Program |
| PRP | Pheasant Restoration Program |
| SD | South Dakota |
| SD GFP | South Dakota Department of Game, Fish & Parks |
| USDA | United States Department of Agriculture |
| USFS | United States Forest Service |
| USFWS | United States Fish & Wildlife Service |
| WHIP | Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program |
| WHIP | Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program |
| WIA | Walk-In Area |
| WPP | Wildlife Partners Program |
| WRP | Wetlands Reserve Program |

# LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. South Dakota has a great diversity (variety) of fish and wildlife. How important is it to you that South Dakota conserves/protects as much fish and wildlife as possible where appropriate?

| Importance (scale) | South Dakota General Public Opinion Surveys | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | **1997** | **2002** | **2004** |
| **Very Important (3)** | 64.2% | 62.3% | 69.3% |
| **Moderately Important (2)** | 20.0% | 26.9% | 25.6% |
| **Slightly Important (1)** | 5.6% | 7.9% | 4.0% |
| **Not Important (0)** | 1.2% | 1.7% | 0.5% |
| **No Opinion (missing)** | 2.0% | 1.2% | 0.6% |
| **Sample Size** | 2,147 | 400 | 735 |
| **Mean** | 2.57 | 2.52 | 2.65 |
| **95% C.I.** | N/A | N/A | 2.61 – 2.69 |

Table 2. How important do you think healthy fish and wildlife populations are to the economy and well-being of South Dakota residents?

| Importance (scale) | South Dakota General Public Opinion Surveys | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | **1997** | **2002** | **2004** |
| **Very Important (3)** | 59.3% | 58.6% | 78.2% |
| **Moderately Important (2)** | 29.4% | 32.5% | 18.7% |
| **Slightly Important (1)** | 7.3% | 7.5% | 2.3% |
| **Not Important (0)** | 1.1% | 0.5% | 0.4% |
| **No Opinion (missing)** | 2.8% | 0.9% | 0.4% |
| **Sample Size** | 2,147 | 404 | 738 |
| **Mean** | 2.51 | 2.51 | 2.75 |
| **95% C.I.** | N/A | N/A | 2.72 – 2.79 |

Table 3. General attitudes related to prairie ecosystems – Maintaining a healthy native prairie ecosystem in South Dakota is important to me.

| Attitude (scale) | 2004 | | 2002 |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Number | Percent | Percent |
| **Strongly Disagree (-3)** | 12 | 1.6% | 0.4% |
| **Moderately Disagree (-2)** | 14 | 1.9% | 0.7% |
| **Slightly Disagree (-1)** | 8 | 1.1% | 1.0% |
| **Neither (0)** | 46 | 6.3% | 11.1% |
| **Slightly Agree (1)** | 202 | 27.8% | 18.5% |
| **Moderately Agree (2)** | 248 | 34.1% | 31.8% |
| **Strongly Agree (3)** | 198 | 27.2% | 36.6% |
| **Total** | 728 | 100% | 404 |
| **Mean (95% C.I.)** | 1.68 (1.59 – 1.77) | | 1.88 (1.77 – 1.99) |
| **SUMMARIZED RESULTS** | | | |
| **Disagree** | 34 | 4.6% | 2.0% |
| **Neither** | 46 | 6.3% | 11.1% |
| **Agree** | 649 | 89.1% | 86.9% |

Table 4. General attitudes related to prairie ecosystems – State agencies should take steps to maintain/restore healthy populations of all native prairie wildlife species in South Dakota.

| Attitude (scale) | 2004 | | 2002 |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Number | Percent | Percent |
| **Strongly Disagree (-3)** | 18 | 2.4% | 3.3% |
| **Moderately Disagree (-2)** | 25 | 3,3% | 3.0% |
| **Slightly Disagree (-1)** | 67 | 9.1% | 7.7% |
| **Neither (0)** | 54 | 7.4% | 14.6% |
| **Slightly Agree (1)** | 269 | 36.7% | 27.3% |
| **Moderately Agree (2)** | 166 | 22.6% | 27.0% |
| **Strongly Agree (3)** | 136 | 18.5% | 17.0% |
| **Total** | 735 | 100% | 403 |
| **Mean (95% C.I.)** | 1.14 (1.04 – 1.25) | | 1.09 (0.94 – 1.23) |
| **SUMMARIZED RESULTS** | | | |
| **Disagree** | 109 | 14.9% | 13.9% |
| **Neither** | 54 | 7.4% | 14.6% |
| **Agree** | 572 | 77.8% | 71.5% |

Table 5. In general, how would you rate GFP's effort to conserve and protect the diversity (variety) of fish and wildlife of South Dakota?

| GFP's focus on wildlife diversity issues is… (scale) | 2004 Public Opinion Survey | |
|---|---|---|
| | Number | Percent |
| **… far too little. (-3)** | 12 | 1.7% |
| **… moderately too little. (-2)** | 30 | 4.1% |
| **… slightly too little. (-1)** | 106 | 14.4% |
| **… just about the right amount. (0)** | 400 | 54.7% |
| **… slightly too much. (1)** | 34 | 4.6% |
| **… moderately too much. (2)** | 13 | 1.7% |
| **… far too much. (3)** | 6 | 0.9% |
| **No Opinion (missing)** | 131 | 17.9% |
| **Total** | 731 | 100% |
| **Mean / 95% C.I.** | -0.21 | -0.28 – -0.14 |
| **SUMMARIZED RESULTS** | | |
| **TOO LITTLE** | 148 | 24.6% |
| **JUST ABOUT RIGHT** | 400 | 66.7% |
| **TOO MUCH** | 52 | 8.7% |
| **Total** | 600 | 100% |

Table 6. Walk-In Area Payment Schedule (1999-2003).

| Acres | Zone 1 | Zone 2 | Zone 3 |
|---|---|---|---|
| **80 - 250** | $250 | $400 | $550 |
| **251 - 500** | $400 | $550 | $800 |
| **501 - 650** | $550 | $800 | $1,100 |
| **651 - 999** | $800 | $1,100 | $1,500 |
| **1,000 - 1,500** | $1,100 | $1,500 | $2,000 |
| **1,500 +** | Negotiable | Negotiable | Negotiable |

Table 7. Acres Enrolled in Walk-In Seeding Cost-Share Program (1999-2003).

| Year | Region 2 | Region 3 | Region 4 |
|---|---|---|---|
| **1999** | 210 | 904 | See Note 2 |
| **2000** | 1,624 | 2,367 | 6,995 |
| **2001** | 367 | 302 | 1,287 |
| **2002** | 0 | 265 | 138 |
| **2003** | 0 | 120 | 71 |

**Note 1: Region 1 was not eligible for the WIA seeding cost-share program.**
**Note 2: Region 4 was not eligible for the program until 2000.**

Table 8. Acres Enrolled in the Walk-In Area CRP Retention Bonus Program (2004-2007).

| Year | Region 1 | Region 2 | Region 3 | Region 4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **2004** | 0 | 10,480 | 5,651 | 84,783 |
| **2005** | 1,673 | 2,430 | 160 | 12,045 |
| **2006** | 0 | 3,158 | 462 | 6,556 |
| **2007** | 0 | 6,059 | 1,004 | 34,788 |

Table 9. AVERAGE PERCENT OF HUNTING TIME FOR GAME BIRDS.

| Type of Land | RESIDENTS 1999 &2005 | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Grouse[1]** | | **Pheasant** | | **Waterfowl** | |
| | **1999** | **2005** | **1999** | **2005** | **1999** | **2005** |
| Private land | 60.0% | 54.5% | 69.5% | 69.3% | 63.2% | 58.7% |
| **Public land** | 15.5% | 17.1% | 8.7% | 8.0% | 21.9% | 26.5% |
| **Walk-In Areas** | 14.7% | 19.8% | 7.4% | 10.1% | 7.8% | 8.8% |
| **Road Right-of-Way** | 9.8% | 8.6% | 14.4% | 12.7% | 7.1% | 6.0% |

| Type of Land | NONRESIDENTS 1999 & 2005 | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Grouse[1]** | | **Pheasant** | |
| | **1999** | **2005** | **1999** | **2005** |
| Private land | 67.3% | 68.9% | 78.7% | 79.9% |
| **Public land** | 15.0% | 10.4% | 7.0% | 7.0% |
| **Walk-In Areas** | 9.7% | 16.2% | 6.1% | 7.3% |
| **Road Right-of-Way** | 7.9% | 4.5% | 8.2% | 5.9% |

Table 10. AVERAGE PERCENT OF HUNTING TIME FOR BIG GAME – RESIDENTS 1999 & 2005.

| Type of Land | East River Deer | | **West River Deer** | | **Antelope** | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **1999** | **2005** | **1999** | **2005** | **1999** | **2005** |
| Private land | 86.6% | 85.5% | 76.0% | 65.5% | 69.1% | 63.1% |
| **Public land** | 8.7% | 7.2% | 15.8% | 18.9% | 13.6% | 9.7% |
| **Walk-In Areas** | 4.7% | 7.3% | 8.3% | 15.7% | 17.4% | 27.2% |

Table 11. Percent Use of Walk-In Areas (1999 & 2005).

| Type of Hunting | % Use of Walk-In Areas | | % Increase in Use | % Change |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1999 | 2005 | | |
| **Resident Grouse[1]** | 14.7% | 19.8% | + 5.1% | 35% |
| **Nonresident Grouse[1]** | 9.7% | 16.2% | + 6.5% | 67% |
| **Resident Pheasant** | 7.4% | 10.1% | + 2.7% | 36% |
| **Nonresident Pheasant** | 6.1% | 7.3% | + 1.2% | 20% |
| **Resident Waterfowl** | 7.8% | 8.8% | + 1.0% | 13% |
| **Resident East River Deer** | 4.7% | 7.3% | + 2.6% | 55% |
| **Resident West River Deer** | 8.3% | 15.7% | + 7.4% | 89% |
| **Resident Antelope** | 17.4% | 27.2% | + 9.8% | 56% |

Table 12. Hunter Rating of Habitat Quality of Walk-In Areas (1999 & 2005).

| Rating of Habitat Quality (scale) | 1999 | 2005 |
|---|---|---|
| **Very Poor (-2)** | 2.5% | 1.0% |
| **Poor (-1)** | 6.1% | 4.3% |
| **Fair (0)** | 25.7% | 21.4% |
| **Good (+1)** | 45.1% | 49.1% |
| **Excellent (+2)** | 20.6% | 24.1% |
| **Number** | 2,213 | 1,152 |
| **Mean** | 0.75 | 0.91 |

Table 13. Importance of Walk-In Areas to Hunters (1999 & 2005).

| Importance of the Walk-In (scale) | 1999 | 2005 |
|---|---|---|
| **Not Important (0)** | 5.5% | 3.7% |
| **Slightly Important (1)** | 11.7% | 9.6% |
| **Moderately Important (2)** | 26.4% | 24.9% |
| **Very Important (3)** | 44.1% | 44.4% |
| **Critical (4)** | 14.1% | 17.4% |
| **Number** | 2,182 | 1,157 |
| **Mean** | 2.48 | 2.62 |

Table 14. Growth of Lower Oahe Waterfowl Access Program.

| | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Acres** | 12,298 | 15,800 | 15,700 | 15,600 | 12,880 | 34,139 | 34,139 | 35,239 | 35,239 |

Table 15. Use and Harvest of Decoy-Only Hunting Unit in the Lower Oahe Waterfowl Hunting Access Area.

| Year | Total Hunters | Harvest |
|---|---|---|
| **1998** | 150 | 28 |
| **1999** | 210 | 108 |
| **2000** | 305 | 315 |
| **2001** | 343 | 121 |
| **2002** | 364 | 154 |
| **2003** | 1,244 | 1,546 |
| **2004** | 1,460 | 1,865 |
| **2005** | 1,122 | 1,141 |
| **2006** | 1,894 | 2,916 |

Table 16. Percent Satisfaction with Daily Hunting at Decoy-Only (1998-2006).

| Satisfaction | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Satisfied** | 66.1% | 69.8% | 68.7% | 58.5% | 72.3% | 81.2% | 78.3% | 79.0% | 84.1% |
| **Neutral** | 14.3% | 23.3% | 22.6% | 25.9% | 18.2% | 12.0% | 15.7% | 13.4% | 10.8% |
| **Dissatisfied** | 19.6% | 7.0% | 8.7% | 15.6% | 9.5% | 6.8% | 6.1% | 7.6% | 5.1% |

Table 17. South Dakota CRP Statistics.

| COUNTY | Acres 09/28/2007 | Acres 10/31/2007 | Acres Lost | Percent Lost |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| AURORA | 17,532 | 13,957 | 3,575 | 20.4% |
| BEADLE | 28,504 | 21,680 | 6,824 | 23.9% |
| BENNETT | 8,590 | 8,287 | 303 | 3.5% |
| BON HOMME | 6,266 | 6,163 | 103 | 1.6% |
| BROOKINGS | 44,804 | 38,389 | 6,415 | 14.3% |
| BROWN | 97,269 | 83,337 | 13,932 | 14.3% |
| BRULE | 8,367 | 7,635 | 732 | 8.7% |
| BUFFALO | 4,058 | 2,735 | 1,323 | 32.6% |
| BUTTE | 24,508 | 19,589 | 4,919 | 20.1% |
| CAMPBELL | 50,978 | 46,267 | 4,711 | 9.2% |
| CHARLES MIX | 15,313 | 15,213 | 100 | 0.7% |
| CLARK | 55,240 | 34,828 | 20,412 | 37.0% |
| CLAY | 6,791 | 6,788 | 3 | 0.0% |
| CODINGTON | 29,392 | 23,132 | 6,260 | 21.3% |
| CORSON | 24,523 | 21,560 | 2,963 | 12.1% |
| CUSTER | Data Not Available | | | |
| DAVISON | 9,359 | 7,974 | 1,385 | 14.8% |
| DAY | 91,751 | 66,349 | 25,402 | 27.7% |
| DEUEL | 45,828 | 38,334 | 7,494 | 16.4% |
| DEWEY | 24,400 | 20,548 | 3,852 | 15.8% |
| DOUGLAS | 6,768 | 6,591 | 177 | 2.6% |
| EDMUNDS | 27,210 | 19,437 | 7,773 | 28.6% |
| FALL RIVER | 1,732 | 1,731 | 1 | 0.1% |
| FAULK | 11,432 | 6,821 | 4,611 | 40.3% |
| GRANT | 30,149 | 17,972 | 12,177 | 40.4% |
| GREGORY | 5,329 | 4,817 | 512 | 9.6% |
| HAAKON | 43,703 | 39,102 | 4,601 | 10.5% |
| HAMLIN | 19,142 | 16,681 | 2,461 | 12.9% |
| HAND | 36,965 | 27,963 | 9,002 | 24.4% |
| HANSON | 6,583 | 5,835 | 748 | 11.4% |
| HARDING | 15,187 | 9,995 | 5,192 | 34.2% |
| HUGHES | 15,639 | 14,181 | 1,458 | 9.3% |
| HUTCHINSON | 14,617 | 13,964 | 653 | 4.5% |
| HYDE | 9,957 | 9,021 | 936 | 9.4% |
| JACKSON | 15,905 | 11,934 | 3,971 | 25.0% |
| JERAULD | 14,963 | 12,634 | 2,329 | 15.6% |
| JONES | 16,674 | 14,690 | 1,984 | 11.9% |
| KINGSBURY | 17,509 | 13,105 | 4,404 | 25.2% |
| LAKE | 15,124 | 13,190 | 1,934 | 12.8% |

Table 17 (continued). South Dakota CRP Statistics.

| COUNTY | Acres 09/28/2007 | Acres 10/31/2007 | Acres Lost | Percent Lost |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| LAWERNCE | Data Not Available | | | |
| LINCOLN | 6,022 | 5,944 | 78 | 1.3% |
| LYMAN | 89,177 | 83,870 | 5,307 | 6.0% |
| MARSHALL | 56,327 | 41,610 | 14,717 | 26.1% |
| MCCOOK | 12,537 | 9,610 | 2,927 | 23.3% |
| MCPHERSON | 48,375 | 41,610 | 6,765 | 14.0% |
| MEADE | 22,186 | 18,175 | 4,011 | 18.1% |
| MELLETTE | 4,210 | 3,747 | 463 | 11.0% |
| MINER | 19,344 | 19,015 | 329 | 1.7% |
| MINNEHAHA | 13,823 | 9,825 | 3,998 | 28.9% |
| MOODY | 21,437 | 14,475 | 6,962 | 32.5% |
| PENNINGTON | 9,948 | 8,398 | 1,550 | 15.6% |
| PERKINS | 40,998 | 35,243 | 5,755 | 14.0% |
| POTTER | 30,543 | 20,470 | 10,073 | 33.0% |
| ROBERTS | 62,177 | 49,978 | 12,199 | 19.6% |
| SANBORN | 24,567 | 19,161 | 5,406 | 22.0% |
| SHANNON | 1,449 | 1,131 | 318 | 21.9% |
| SPINK | 39,217 | 32,905 | 6,312 | 16.1% |
| STANLEY | 48,158 | 43,276 | 4,882 | 10.1% |
| SULLY | 20,589 | 17,044 | 3,545 | 17.2% |
| TODD | 534 | 489 | 45 | 8.4% |
| TRIPP | 16,617 | 15,024 | 1,593 | 9.6% |
| TURNER | 9,317 | 9,097 | 220 | 2.4% |
| UNION | 7,432 | 6,797 | 635 | 8.5% |
| WALWORTH | 20,766 | 19,480 | 1,286 | 6.2% |
| YANKTON | 8,137 | 7,866 | 271 | 3.3% |
| ZIEBACH | 22,218 | 14,889 | 7,329 | 33.0% |
| **TOTAL** | **1,613,519** | **1,330,944** | **282,608** | **17.5%** |

Data Source: USDA Farm Agency Website (www.fsa.usda.gov)

Table 18. Wildlife Partners Program – Statistics.

| | FENCING | | | NESTING COVER | | | WOODY COVER | | | FOOD HABITAT PLOTS | | | WALK-IN-AREAS | | | PROGRAM TOTALS | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Year | Coops | Acres | Payments | Coops | Acres | Payments | Coops | Acres | Payments | Coops | Acres | Payments | Coops | Acres | Payments | Coops | Acres | Payments |
| 1977 | | | | 176 | 5,232 | $ 21,373 | | | | | | | | | | 176 | 5,232 | $ 21,373 |
| 1978 | | | | 348 | 9,905 | $ 136,135 | | | | | | | | | | 348 | 9,905 | $ 136,135 |
| 1979 | | | | 505 | 14,264 | $ 270,058 | 21 | 72 | $ 5,389 | | | | | | | 526 | 14,336 | $ 275,447 |
| 1980 | | | | 536 | 15,269 | $ 334,747 | 35 | 95 | $ 10,877 | | | | | | | 571 | 15,364 | $ 345,624 |
| 1981 | | | | 478 | 14,442 | $ 397,688 | 32 | 97 | $ 7,796 | | | | | | | 510 | 14,539 | $ 405,484 |
| 1982 | | | | 748 | 19,916 | $ 517,138 | 37 | 102 | $ 10,003 | | | | | | | 785 | 20,018 | $ 527,141 |
| 1983 | | | | 808 | 25,698 | $ 685,170 | 26 | 59 | $ 6,408 | | | | | | | 834 | 25,757 | $ 691,578 |
| 1984 | | | | 829 | 26,320 | $ 702,444 | 91 | 206 | $ 14,232 | | | | | | | 920 | 26,526 | $ 716,676 |
| 1985 | | | | 837 | 26,438 | $ 704,159 | 28 | 66 | $ 6,922 | | | | | | | 865 | 26,504 | $ 711,081 |
| 1986 | | | | 642 | 20,699 | $ 538,328 | 15 | 49 | $ 3,202 | | | | | | | 657 | 20,748 | $ 541,530 |
| 1987 | | | | 529 | 15,844 | $ 409,422 | 83 | 361 | $ 16,982 | | | | | | | 612 | 16,205 | $ 426,404 |
| 1988 | | | | 402 | 11,221 | $ 288,614 | 95 | 464 | $ 34,093 | 591 | 14,115 | $ 141,716 | 26 | 23,161 | $ 17,250 | 1,114 | 48,961 | $ 481,673 |
| 1989 | | | | 99 | 2,448 | $ 69,043 | 159 | 936 | $ 79,634 | 612 | 11,286 | $ 197,973 | 95 | 112,169 | $ 65,125 | 965 | 126,839 | $ 411,775 |
| 1990 | | | | 67 | 1,623 | $ 44,572 | 290 | 1,795 | $ 152,520 | 674 | 11,643 | $ 205,635 | 129 | 142,154 | $ 84,100 | 1,160 | 157,215 | $ 486,827 |
| 1991 | | | | 6 | 313 | $ 3,370 | 254 | 2,180 | $ 188,474 | 961 | 10,303 | $ 189,351 | 217 | 219,245 | $ 140,925 | 1,438 | 232,041 | $ 522,120 |
| 1992 | | | | | | | 370 | 2,307 | $ 204,956 | 977 | 10,306 | $ 211,586 | 401 | 331,731 | $ 235,170 | 1,748 | 344,344 | $ 651,712 |
| 1993 | | | | | | | 340 | 2,027 | $ 189,449 | 856 | 9,537 | $ 196,646 | 504 | 409,288 | $ 296,249 | 1,700 | 420,852 | $ 682,344 |
| 1994 | 1 | 10 | $ 250 | | | | 357 | 1,945 | $ 182,241 | 795 | 9,000 | $ 185,858 | 576 | 444,820 | $ 330,309 | 1,729 | 455,775 | $ 698,658 |
| 1995 | 1 | 7 | $ 301 | | | | 317 | 1,726 | $ 181,878 | 777 | 8,738 | $ 181,130 | 609 | 475,097 | $ 354,435 | 1,704 | 485,568 | $ 717,744 |
| 1996 | 4 | 203 | $ 2,482 | 2 | 68 | $ 426 | 311 | 1,527 | $ 154,881 | 774 | 8,993 | $ 186,136 | 653 | 522,700 | $ 383,280 | 1,744 | 533,491 | $ 727,205 |
| 1997 | 3 | 10 | $ 860 | | | | 292 | 1,325 | $ 127,490 | 778 | 8,413 | $ 173,457 | 661 | 534,520 | $ 402,580 | 1,734 | 544,268 | $ 704,387 |
| 1998 | 4 | 30 | $ 1,330 | 1 | 10 | $ 127 | 336 | 1,766 | $ 181,461 | 789 | 8,955 | $ 186,016 | 663 | 535,535 | $ 404,045 | 1,793 | 546,296 | $ 772,979 |
| 1999 | 8 | 342 | $ 5,156 | 1 | 27 | $ 399 | 343 | 1,794 | $ 232,719 | 796 | 8,469 | $ 178,739 | 757 | 619,479 | $ 618,933 | 1,905 | 630,111 | $ 1,035,946 |
| 2000 | 5 | 155 | $ 2,454 | 4 | 82 | $ 1,227 | 348 | 1,974 | $ 262,977 | 751 | 8,299 | $ 174,961 | 1,005 | 781,016 | $ 891,979 | 2,113 | 791,526 | $ 1,333,598 |
| 2001 | 8 | 490 | $ 4,178 | | | | 387 | 2,174 | $ 312,395 | 747 | 8,148 | $ 171,246 | 1,048 | 821,627 | $ 845,209 | 2,190 | 832,439 | $ 1,333,028 |
| 2002 | 1 | 100 | $ 256 | | | | 372 | 2,393 | $ 334,609 | 791 | 8,583 | $ 180,844 | 1,049 | 901,966 | $ 857,446 | 2,213 | 913,042 | $ 1,373,155 |
| 2003 | 5 | 20 | $ 3,892 | 10 | 469 | $ 9,964 | 371 | 2,034 | $ 368,464 | 828 | 9,346 | $ 195,249 | 1,021 | 903,035 | $ 852,923 | 2,235 | 914,904 | $ 1,430,492 |
| 2004 | 3 | 52 | $ 2,951 | | | | 242 | 1,141 | $ 214,138 | 880 | 9,883 | $ 214,700 | 1,062 | 935,163 | $ 1,602,809 | 2,187 | 946,239 | $ 2,034,598 |
| 2005 | 16 | 235 | $ 8,997 | 5 | 84 | $ 3,721 | 165 | 683 | $ 241,955 | 886 | 10,268 | $ 224,964 | 1,138 | 1,025,873 | $ 1,843,453 | 2,210 | 1,037,143 | $ 2,323,090 |
| 2006 | 8 | 44 | $ 5,207 | 11 | 255 | $ 11,029 | 87 | 252 | $ 184,505 | 986 | 11,418 | $ 246,714 | 1,187 | 1,079,760 | $ 1,994,075 | 2,279 | 1,091,729 | $ 2,441,530 |
| 2007 | 6 | 47 | $ 4,806 | 13 | 130 | $ 9,722 | 77 | 269 | $ 192,329 | 1,009 | 11,515 | $ 246,000 | 1,130 | 1,152,100 | $ 2,029,108 | 2,235 | 1,164,061 | $ 2,481,964 |
| **Total** | **73** | **1,745** | **$ 43,119** | **7,057** | **210,757** | **$ 5,158,876** | **5,881** | **31,819** | **$ 4,102,979** | **16,258** | **197,218** | **$ 3,888,921** | **13,931** | **11,970,439** | **$ 14,249,403** | **43,200** | **12,411,978** | **$ 27,443,297** |

Table 19. SD GFP Contributions to Site-Specific USFWS Contracts (2000-2007).

| PRACTICE TYPE | ACRES/MILES | SD GFP DOLLARS |
|---|---|---|
| Riparian | 34.7 miles | $30,495 |
| Grazing Systems | 100,047 acres | $300,431 |
| Grass Seedings | 119,922 acres | $139,946 |
| New Dams | 2,235 acres | $833,855 |
| Dam Repairs | 63 acres | $11,198 |
| Wetland Restorations | 215 acres | $62,020 |
| **TOTAL** | **222,516.7 acres/miles** | **$1,377,945** |

Table 20. Wetland/Grassland Habitat Program—Statistics (2002-2007).

| Practice Type | Contracts | Acres | SD GFP Cost-share | Cooperator Cost-share | Partner Cost-share | Total Cost |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| FWP Incentive | 79 | 228.0 | $143,010.03 | $181,592.28 | $2,698,430.11 | $3,023,149.92 |
| Riparian Pasture Management | 1 | 12.0 | $727.31 | $1,219.19 | $0.00 | $1,951.50 |
| Upland Enhancement | 86 | 26,656.1 | $276,009.62 | $377,497.54 | $120,884.80 | $784,845.06 |
| Upland Restoration | 97 | 6,090.2 | $269,961.53 | $294,254.26 | $49,664.55 | $613,880.34 |
| Wetland Creation | 124 | 493.6 | $761,665.54 | $345,554.21 | $118,360.96 | $1,225,580.71 |
| Wetland Enhancement | 108 | 497.0 | $431,438.65 | $225,171.11 | $77,432.79 | $734042.55 |
| Wetland Restoration | 17 | 119.7 | $22,747.32 | $1,572.97 | $2,115.28 | $26,435.57 |
| **TOTAL** | **512** | **34,096.6** | **$1,905,560.00** | **$1,426,854.56** | **$3,066,888.49** | **$6,409,885.65** |

# LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Ecoregions of South Dakota as identified in the SD Wildlife Action Plan.

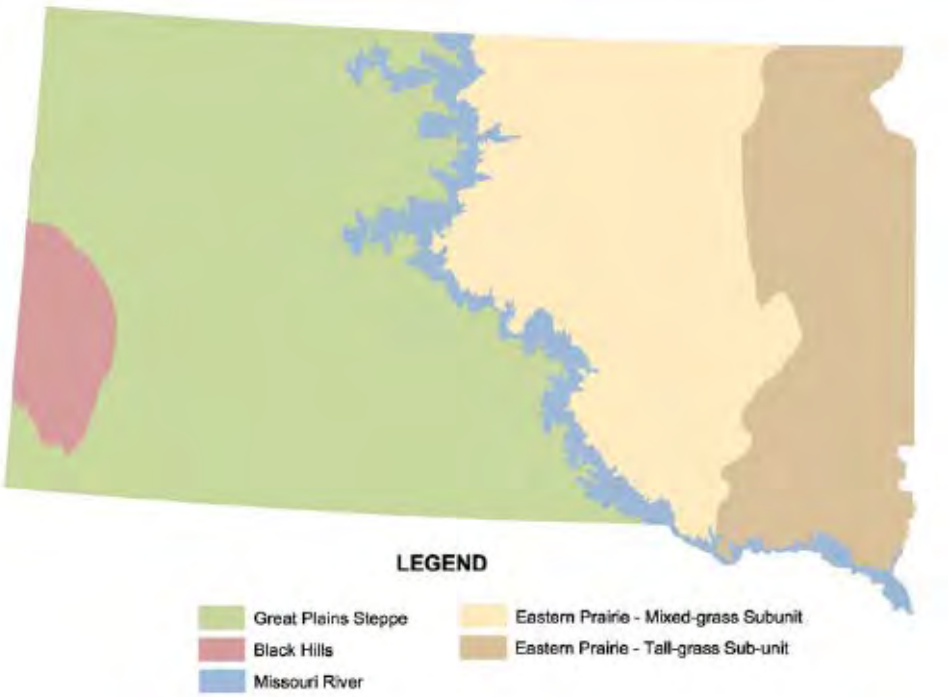



Figure 2. Walk-In Area Payment Zone Map (1999-2003).

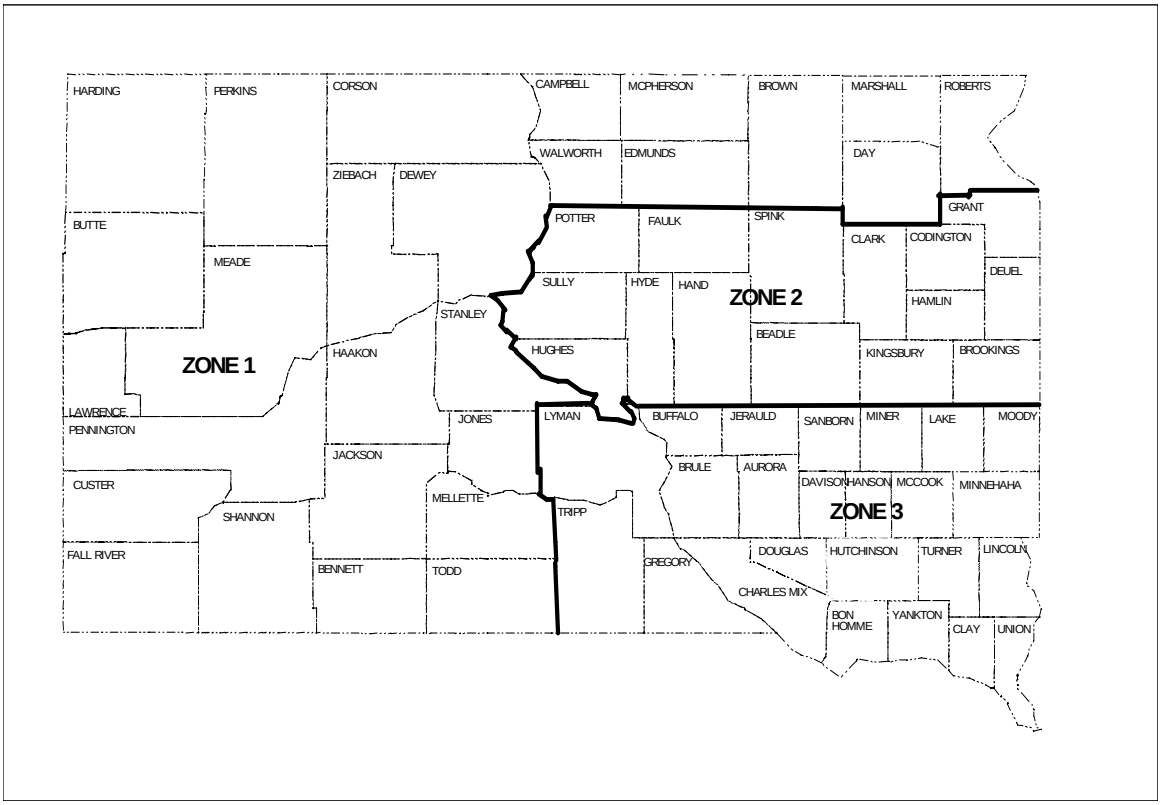


Figure 3. Distribution of SD GFP Walk-In Area Program (2007).

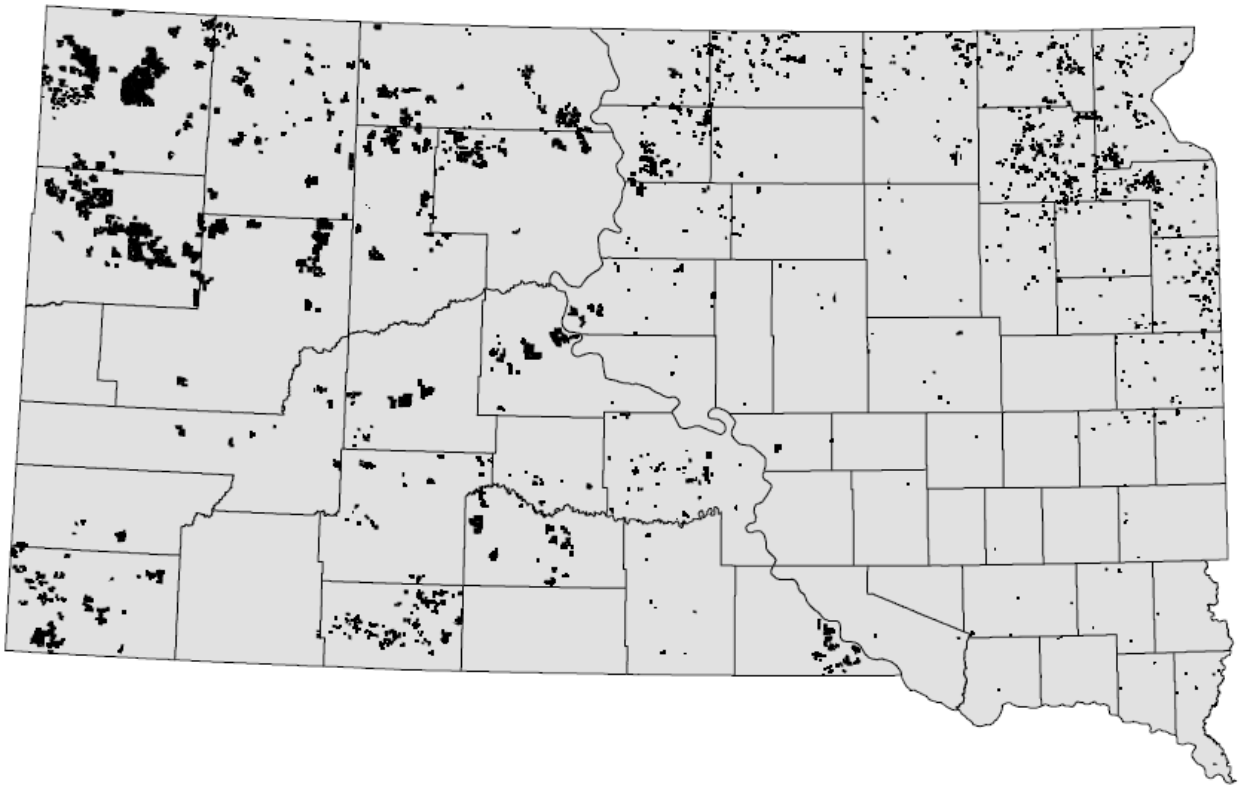


Figure 4. Regional Structure of Division of Wildlife—Operations Section.

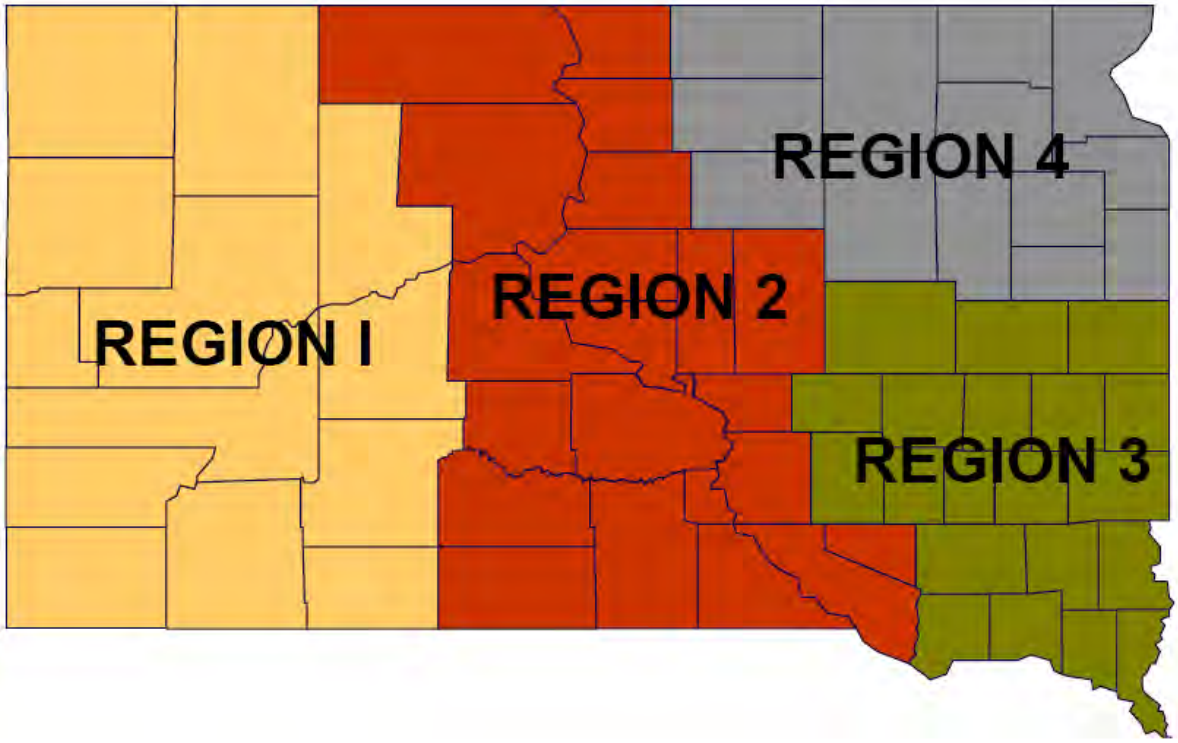
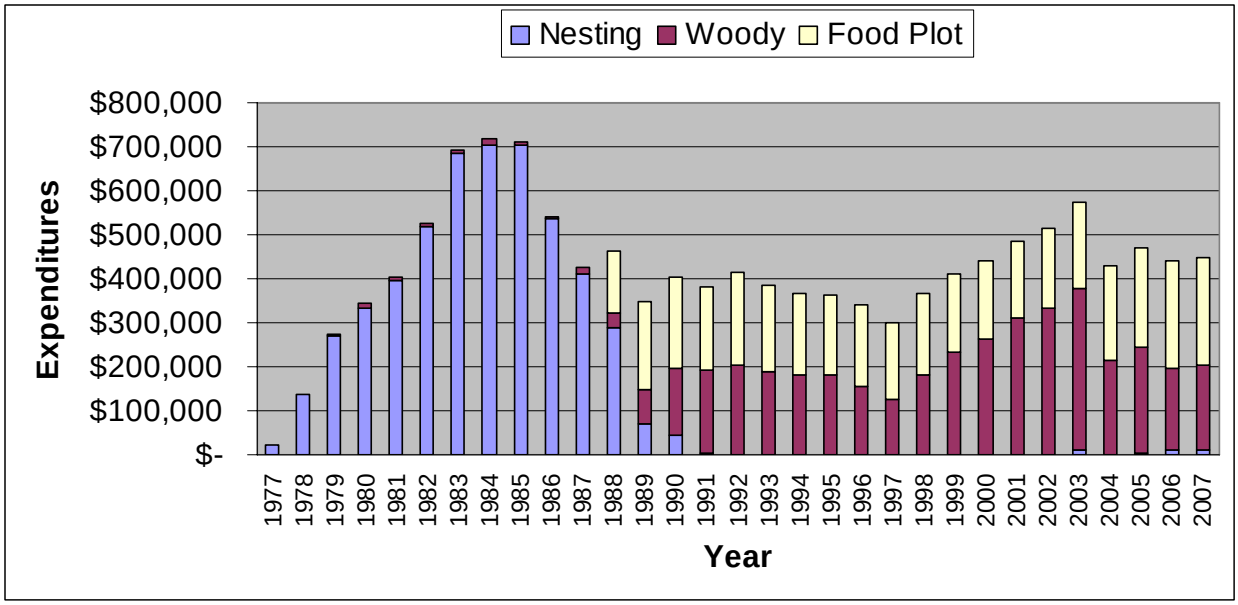


Figure 5. Wildlife Partners Program – Expenditures over Time.



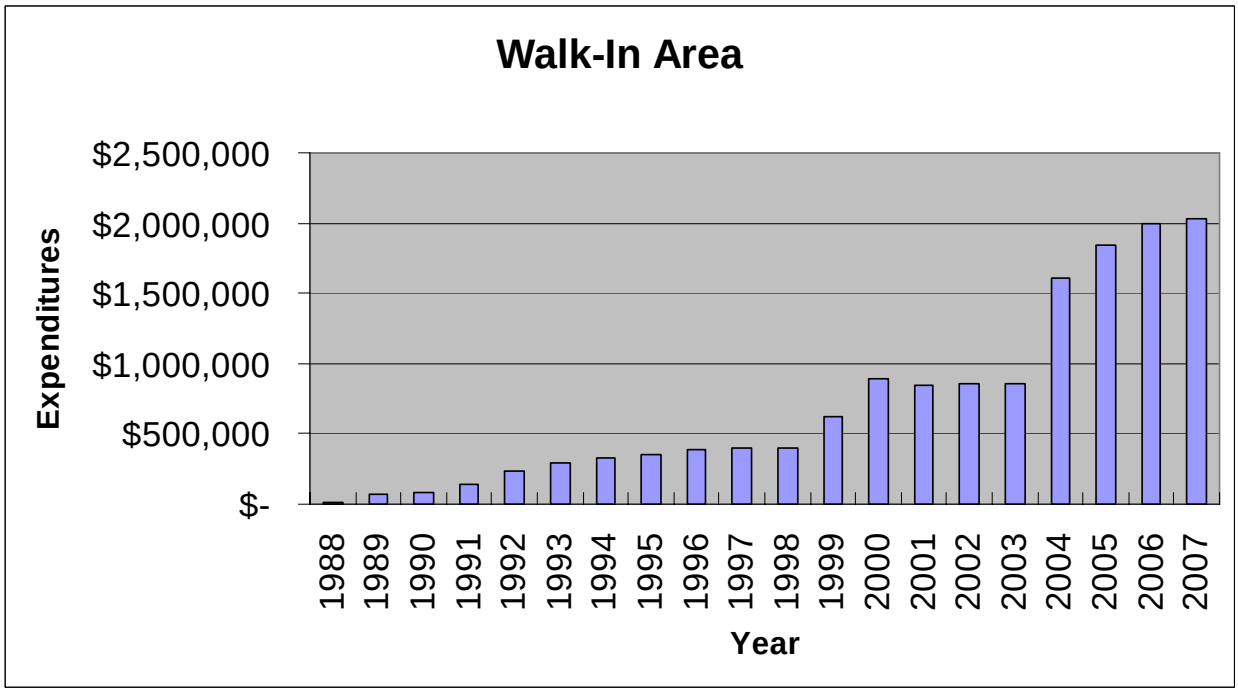



Figure 6. Distribution of SD GFP Habitat Fencing Projects (1994-2007).

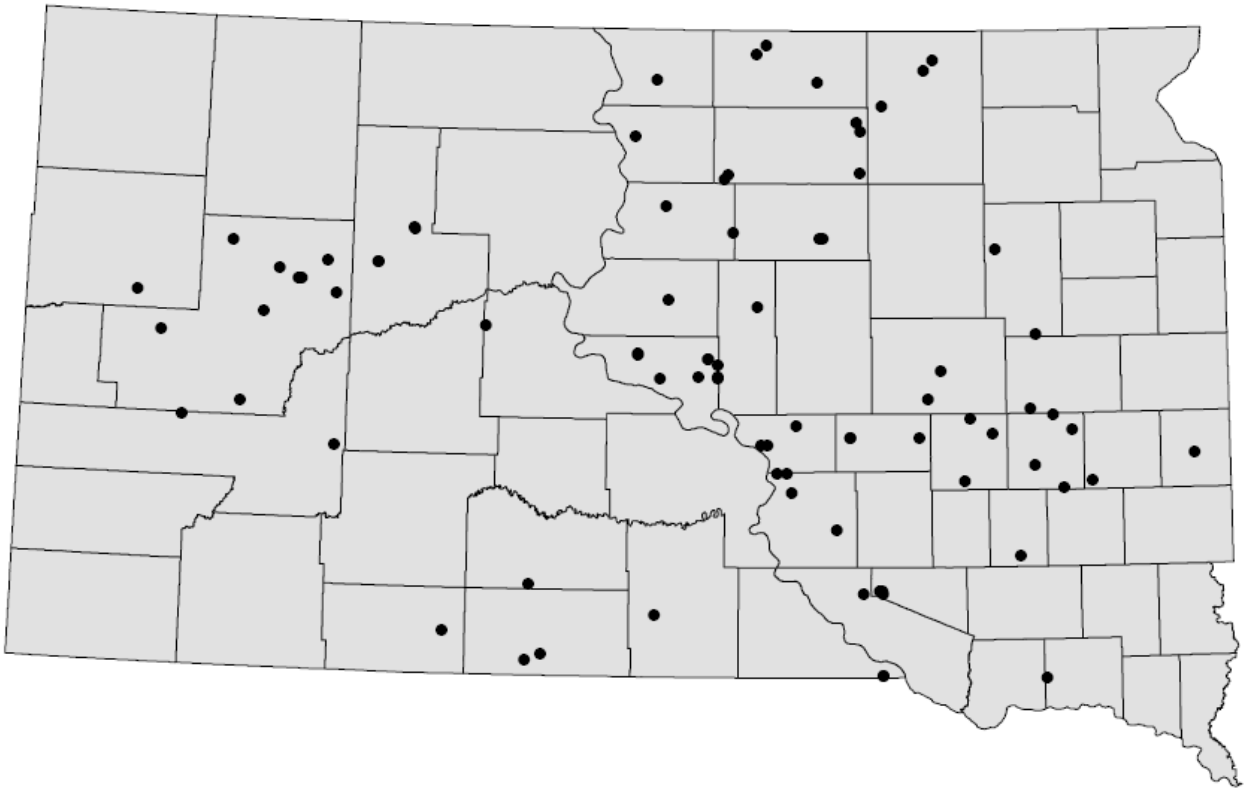


Figure 7. Distribution of SD GFP Nesting Cover Projects (1996-2007).

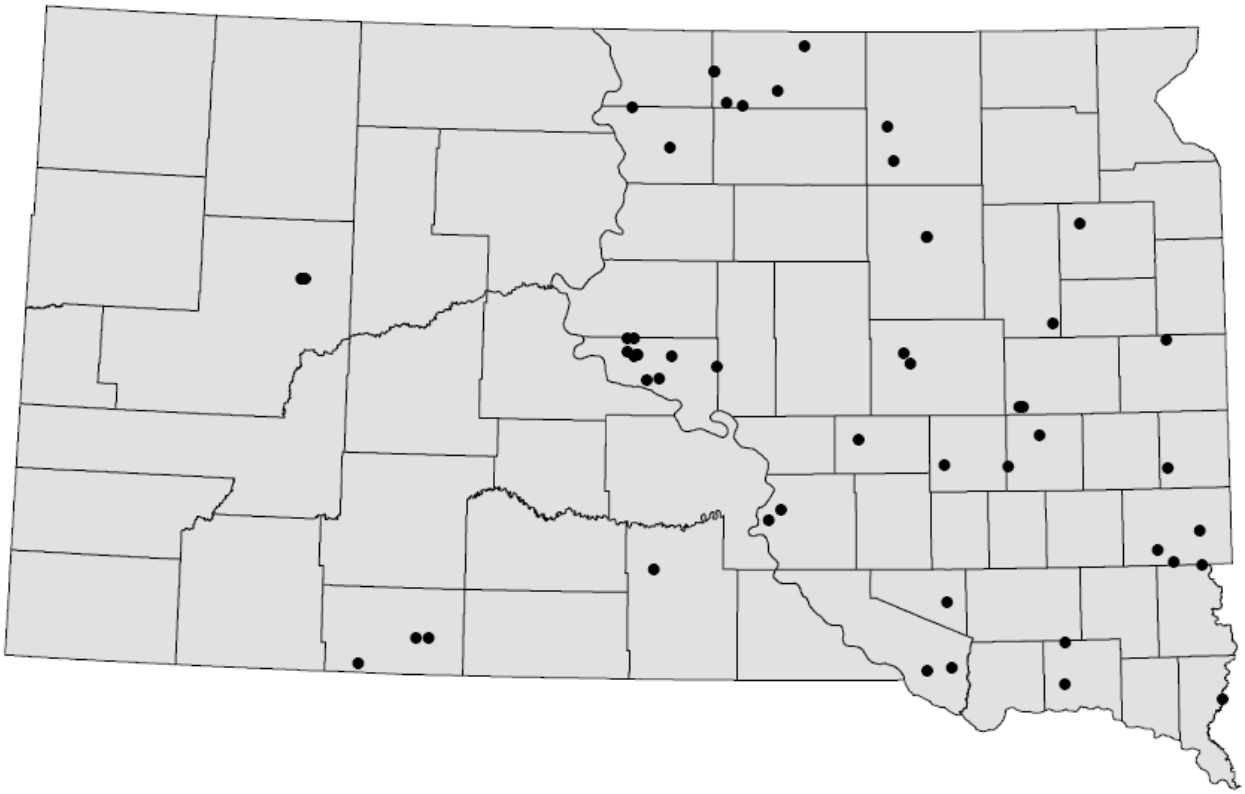


Figure 8. Distribution of SD GFP Woody Habitat Projects (1994-2007).

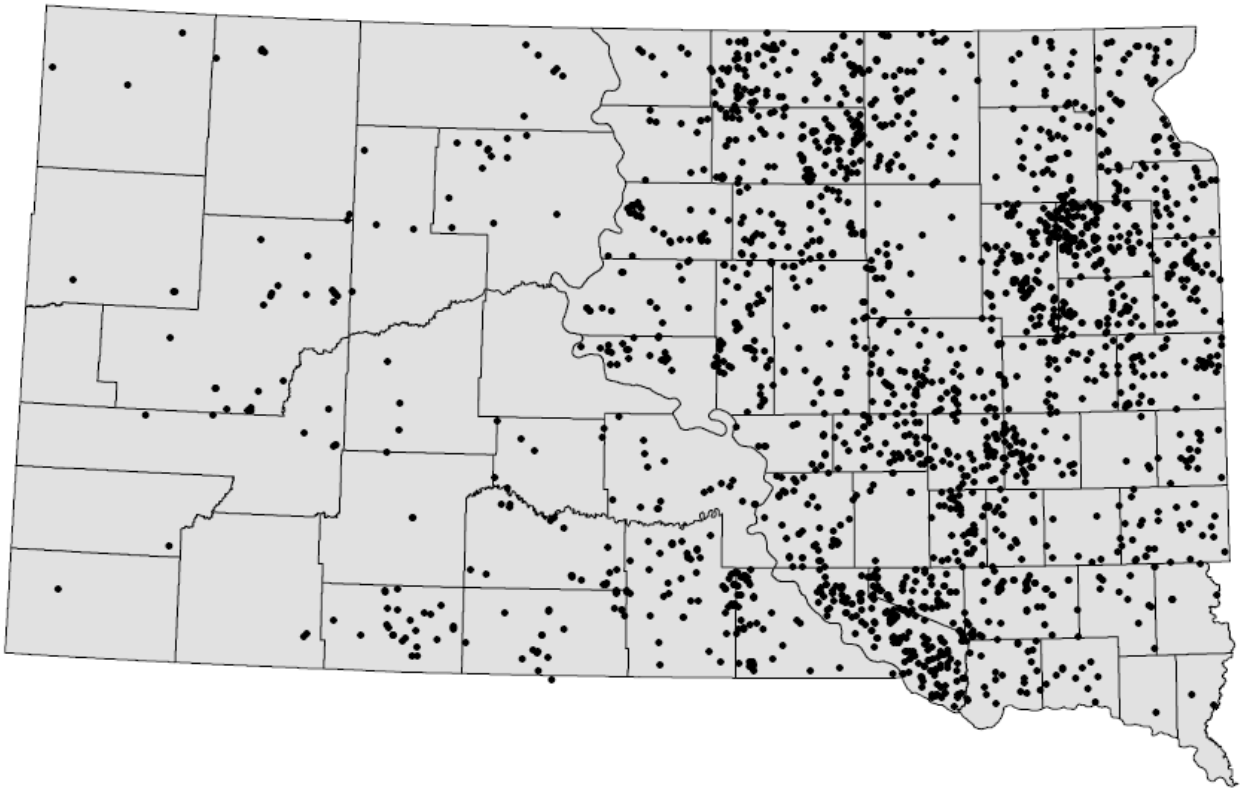


Figure 9. Acres Enrolled per County in SD GFP Food Habitat Plot Program (2007).

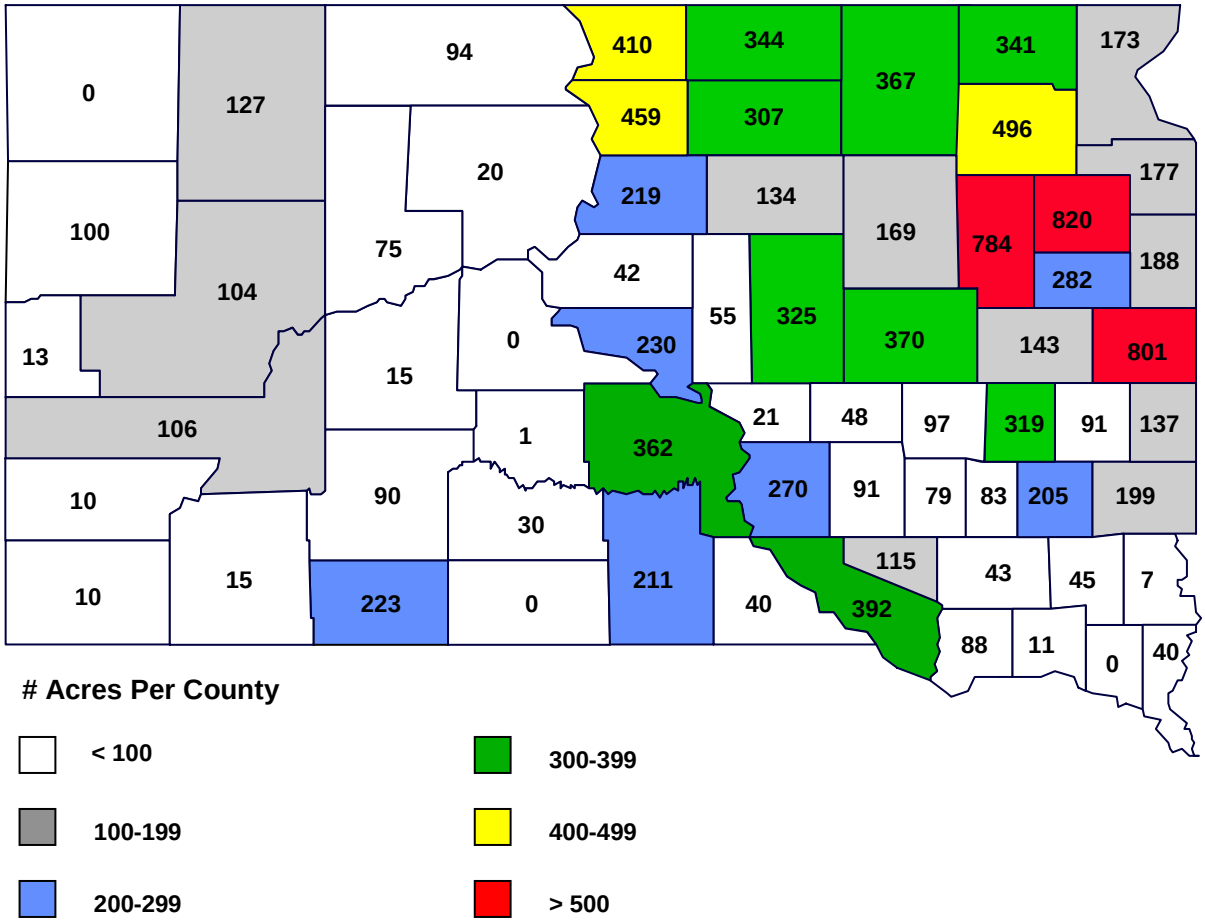


Figure 10. Distribution of SD GFP FWP Incentive Program (2004-2007).

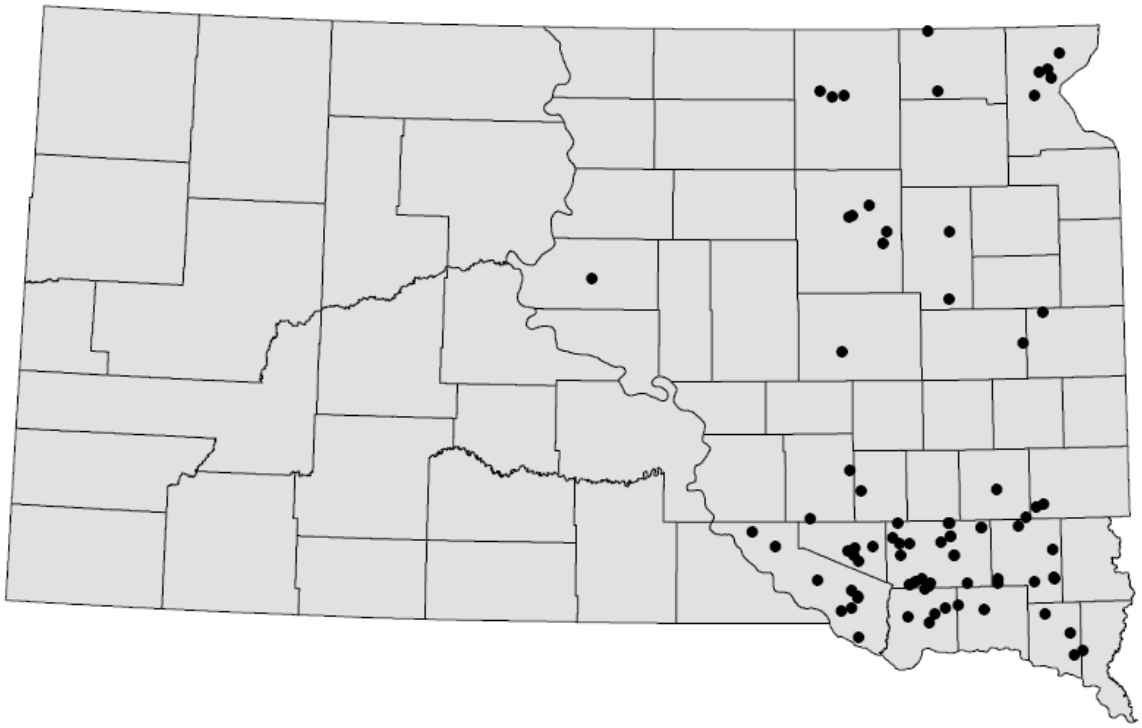


Figure 11. Distribution of SD GFP Upland Enhancement Program (1994-2007).

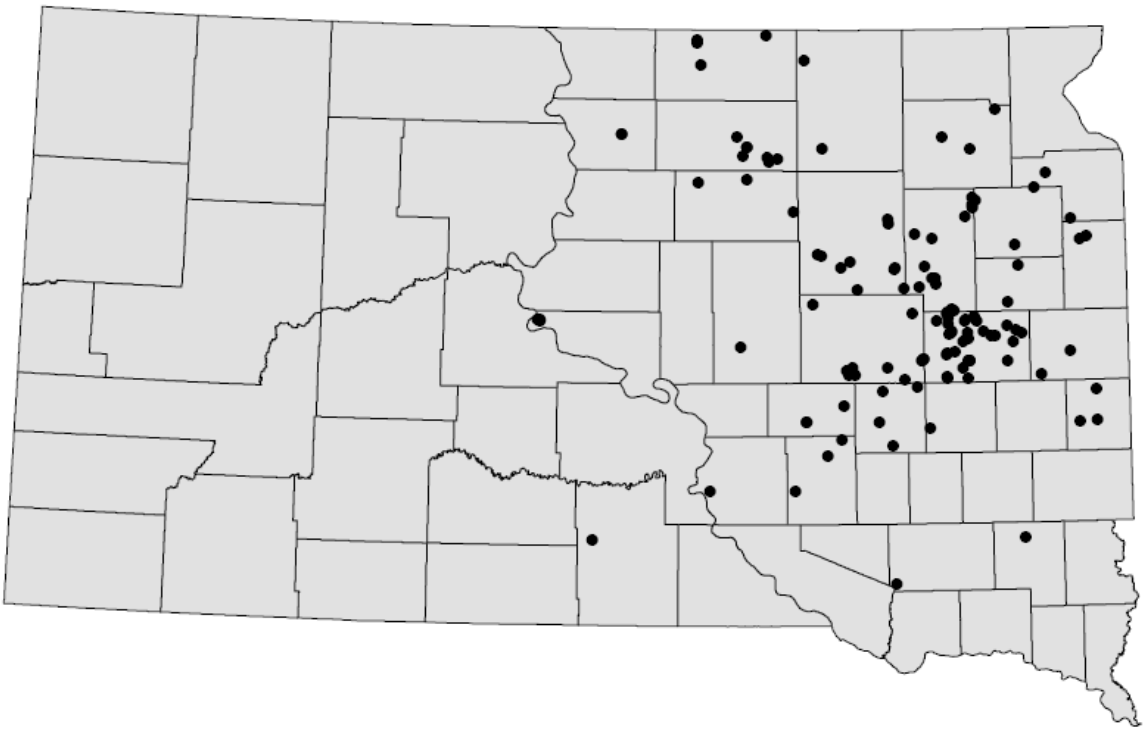


Figure 12. Distribution of SD GFP Upland Restoration Program (1994-2007).

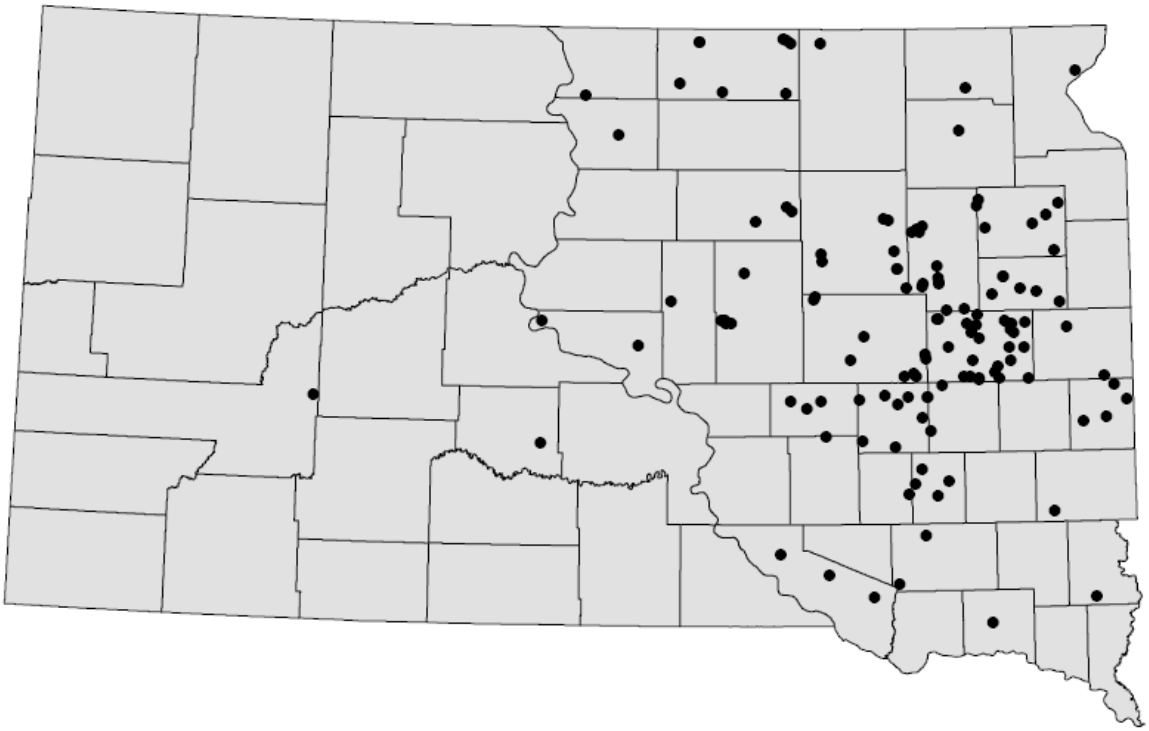


Figure 13. Distribution of SD GFP Wetland Creation & Enhancement Program (1994-2007).

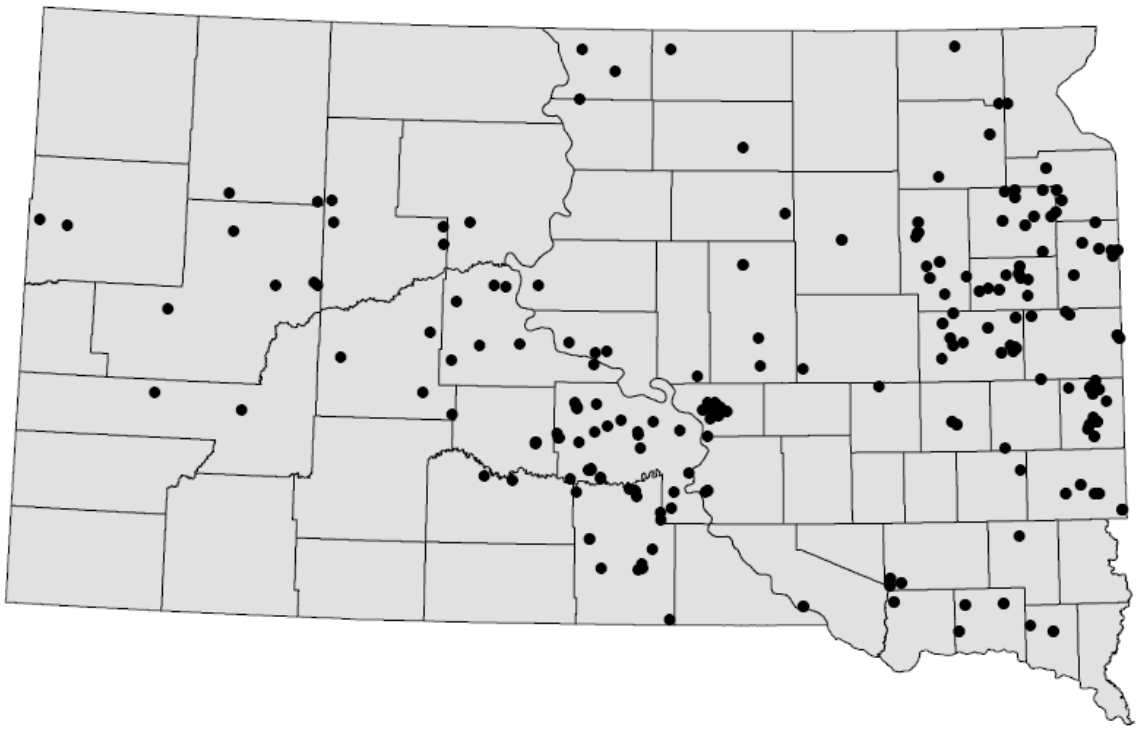


Figure 14. Distribution of SD GFP Wetland Restoration Program (1994-2007).

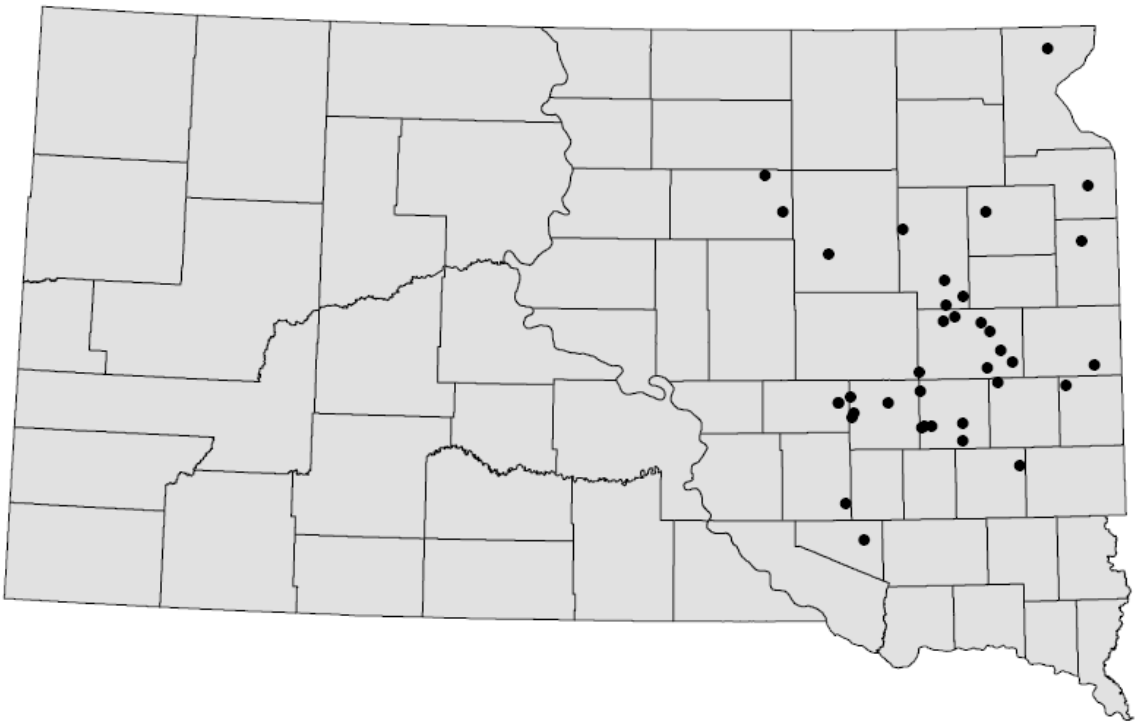


Figure 15. Distribution of SD GFP/USFWS Partnership Projects (2000-2007)

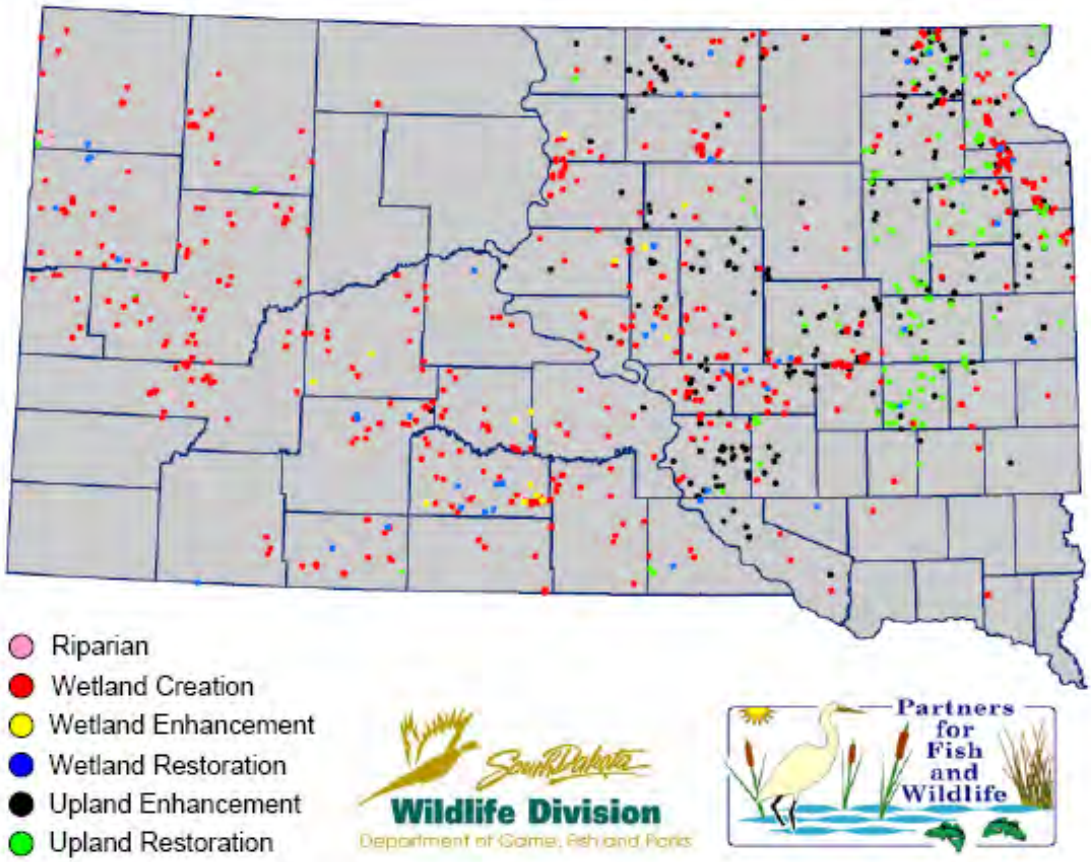
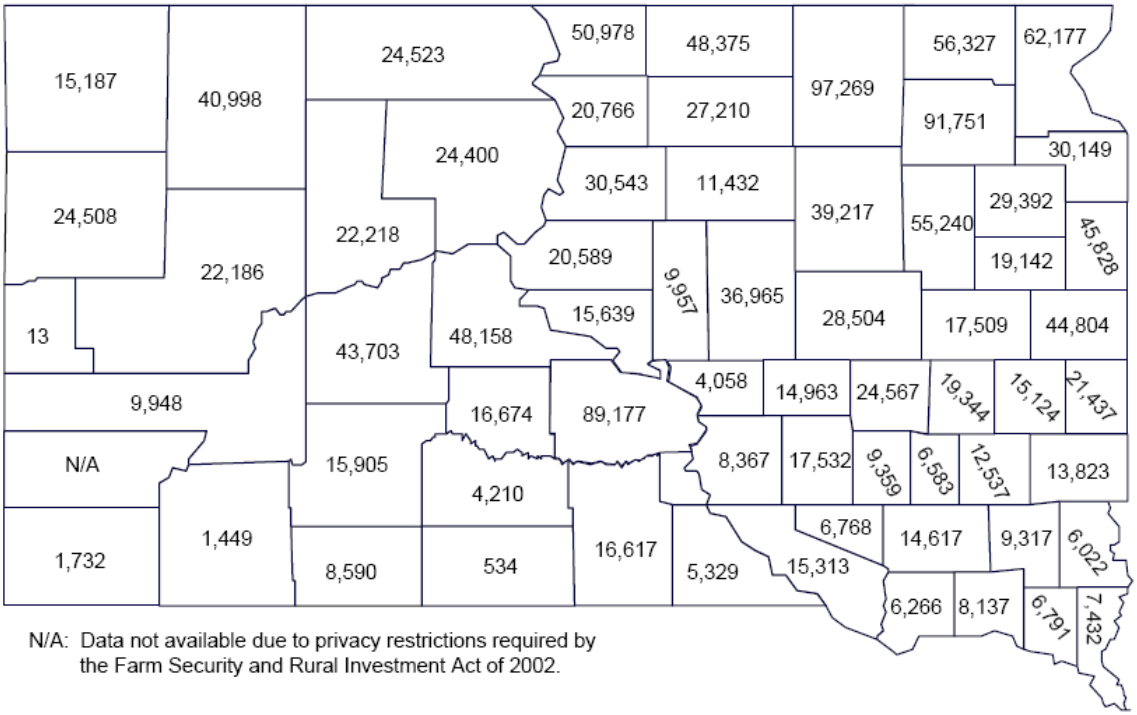
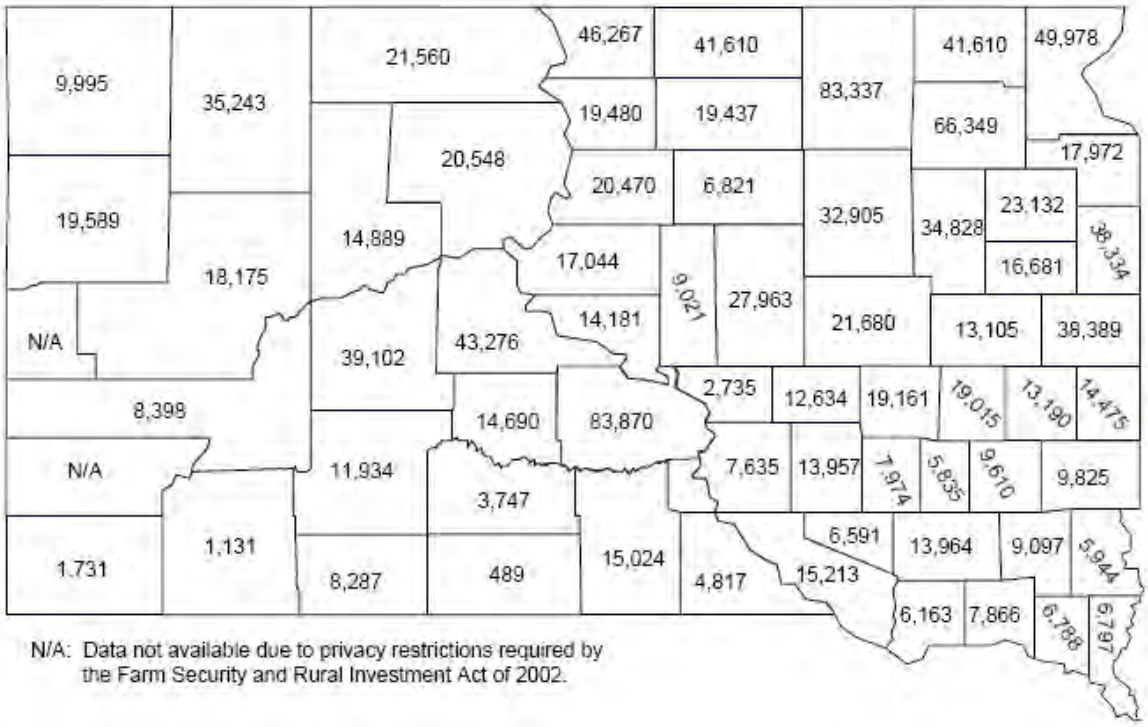


Figure 16. CRP Acres in South Dakota as of 9/28/07.




N/A: Data not available due to privacy restrictions required by the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002.

Figure 17. CRP Acres in South Dakota as of 10/31/07.




N/A: Data not available due to privacy restrictions required by the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002.

Figure 18. CRP Conservation Practice Descriptions.

| Code | (Gen)eral CRP or (C)ontinuous | Practice Name | Eligible for managed haying & grazing? | NRCS Standard | CRP-1 Length (Years) | Incentive payment | CCRP-SIP signing incentive payment | CCRP-PIP practice incentive payment | Maintenance rate | Design criteria, minimums and maximums 10/02/06 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| CP1 | Gen * | Establishment of Permanent **Introduced** Grasses and Legumes | Yes | **327** | 10 | Only for CCRP 10% | | Only for CCRP 40% of the installation costs | $4/ac | Sowing of approved cover shall be completed within 12 months of the effective date of CRP-1. Managed haying or grazing allowed if included in the conservation plan. C/S allowed to develop permanent water source for wildlife. Can earn C/S for temporary cover if needed. |
| CP2 | Gen * | Establishment of Permanent **Native** Grasses | Yes | **327** | 10 | Only for CCRP 10% | | Only for CCRP 40% of the installation costs | $4/ac | Sowing of approved cover shall be completed within 12 months of the effective date of CRP-1. Managed haying or grazing allowed if included in the conservation plan. C/S allowed to develop permanent water source for wildlife. Can earn C/S for temporary cover if needed. |
| CP3 | Gen * | Tree Planting (Timber planting) | No | **612** | 10 | Only for CCRP 10% | | Only for CCRP 40% of the installation costs | $4/ac | Mostly conifers in a timber planting that will provide multipurpose forest benefits. C/S authorized for native grass & shrubs in 15 to 20% openings for wildlife. Protect from fire and livestock grazing. |
| CP3A | Gen * | Hardwood Tree Planting (Timber planting) | No | **612** | 10 to 15 | Only for CCRP 10% | | Only for CCRP 40% of the installation costs | $4/ac | Mostly hardwood trees in a timber planting. Conifers added to provide wildlife habitat diversiity and used as nurse trees, with no commercial use made of them. Protect from fire and livestock grazing. |
| CP4B | Gen * | Permanent Wildlife Habitat (Corridors) | Yes | **645** | 10 to 15 | Only for CCRP 10% | | Only for CCRP 40% of the installation costs | $4/ac | Purpose is to connect 2 existing wildlife habitat areas. Ineligible if existing cover provides an unbroken travel lane for wildlife. 66 to 200 feet wide. Shall have periodic management activities performed which can be managed haying or grazing. A wildlife conservation plan must be developed. |
| CP4D | Gen * | Permanent Wildlife Habitat | Yes | **645** | 10 | Only for CCRP 10% | | Only for CCRP 40% of the installation costs | $4/ac | Sowing of approved cover shall be completed within 12 months of the effective date of CRP-1. Shall have periodic management activities performed which can be managed haying or grazing. C/S allowed to develop permanent water source for wildlife. A wildlife conservation plan must be developed. |
| CP5A | C | Field Windbreak Establishment | No | **380** | 10 to 15 | 20% | $10/ac/yr Max $100 | 40% of the installation costs | $6/ac(new) | Field "L" must exceed table value for erosion potential greater than "T". Must be located to reduce wind erosion from primary wind direction. Maximum of 5 rows. Can have several sets, each greater than 10 H apart. Can C/S plastic mulch or drip irrigation if the average annual precipitation is 25 inches or less. |
| CP8A | C | Grass Waterways | No @ | **412** | 10 | 20% | $10/ac/yr Max $100 | 40% of the installation costs | $4/ac | Installed to meet the minimum criteria to convey water off a field. Design to handle runoff from a 10-year, 24 hour storm event. May be installed up to 2 times minimum design standard, not to exceed a maximum width of 100 feet. |
| CP9 | C | Shallow Water Areas for Wildlife | No | **646** | 10 | | | 40% of the installation costs | $4/ac | Develop average water depth of 6 to 18 inches for majority of the year. Max. of 10 acres per tract. West of 100th meridian and <25 " annual precip., provide water for a minimum of 4 months. Must include an adequate buffer of vegetation, not less than 20 feet or more than 120 feet. |
| CP10 | Gen * | Vegetative Cover - Grass - Already Established | Yes | **327** | 10 | Only for CCRP 10% | | 40% of the installation costs only on CCRP | $4/ac | C/S is not authorized for this practice. Grass cover approved for the applicable signup. C/S is authorized for performance of required management activity. |
| CP11 | Gen | Vegetative Cover - Trees - Already Established | No | | 10 | | | | | |
| CP12 | Gen | Wildlife Food Plot | No | **645** | 10 to 15 | | | | | Individual food plots shall not exceed 5 acres in size and shall not be immediately adjacent. To be used in conjunction with the following practices only: CP1, CP2, CP3, CP3A, CP4D, CP10, CP11. C/S is not authorized for this practice. |
| CP15A | C | Estab. of Permanent Vegetative Cover (Contour Grass Strips) | No @ | **332** | 10 | | | 40% of the installation costs | $4/ac | Establish permanent vegetative cover in strips 15 to 30 feet wide on the contour. Alternated with wider cultivated strips. Bottom strip can be 60 feet wide. Installed to minimum needed to control erosion. Maximum of 15 foot field borders may be included if needed to drain water from the field. |
| CP15B | C | Estab. of Perm. Vegetative Cover (Contour Grass Strips) on Terraces | | **332** | 10 | | | NO PIP | $4/ac | Establish permanent vegetative cover on functional terraces. Alternated with wider cultivated strips. Existing grassed areas not eligible. Maximum width is 60 feet, which can include a 10-foot buffer above the cut slope, and a 10-foot buffer below the ridge toe. |
| CP16A | C | Shelterbelt Establishment | No | **380** | 10 to 15 | | $10/ac/yr Max $100 | 40% of the installation costs | $6/ac(new) | Installed to design standard in FOTG to protect farmsteads or livestock areas. May be applied up to 2 times the design width needed for protecting farmsteads. Can C/S plastic mulch or drip irrigation if the average annual precipitation is 25 inches or less. Protect from fire and grazing. |
| CP17A | C | Living Snow Fences | No | **380** | 10 to 15 | | $10/ac/yr Max $100 | 40% of the installation costs | $6/ac(new) | Installed to the design standard in FOTG. The maximum width shall not exceed that needed for snow management; 3 to 5 rows. Can C/S plastic mulch or drip irrigation if the average annual precipitation is 25 inches or less. Protect from fire and livestock grazing. |
| CP18B | C | Establishment of Permanent Vegetation to Reduce Salinity | Yes | **610** | 10 | | | 40% of the installation costs | $4/ac | Establish either permanent salt tolerant vegetative cover within saline seep areas (EC > 4) or perm. veg. cover in areas causing seeps. For seeps < 5 acres the recharge area cannot exceed a 10:1 ratio. Address the resource problem with the min. acreage needed. Shall not exceed 50 acres in size. |
| CP18C | C | Establishment of Permanent Salt Tolerant Vegetative Cover | Yes | **610** | 10 | | | 40% of the installation costs | $4/ac | Establish permanent salt tolerant vegetative cover on areas with existing high water tables. Address the resource need with minimum acreage needed to control the saline seep. Shall not exceed 50 acres in size. |
| CP21 | C | Filter Strips | No @ | **393** | 10 to 15 | 20% | $10/ac/yr Max $100 | 40% of the installation costs | $4/ac $8 or $9/ac | Immediately adjacent and parallel to streams, wetlands, lakes and other permanent water bodies. Minimum width is 20 feet. Maximum average width cannot exceed 120 feet. Can C/S permanent fences to exclude livestock and watering facilities away from filter strip. |

Figure 18 (continued). CRP Conservation Practice Descriptions.

| Code | (Gen)eral CRP or (C)ontinuous | Practice Name | Eligible for managed haying & grazing? | NRCS Standard | CRP-1 Length (Years) | Incentive payment | CCRP-SIP signing incentive payment | CCRP-PIP practice incentive payment | Maintenance rate | Design criteria, minimums and maximums 10/02/06 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| CP22 | C | Riparian Buffer | No | **391** | 10 to 15 | 20% | $10/ac/yr Max $100 | 40% of the installation costs | $6/ac(new) $8 or $9/ac | See statement below! |
| CP23 | C | Wetland Restoration | No | **327 657** | 10 to 15 | | NO SIP | NO PIP | $4/ac | **Only on 100 year floodplains** of permanent rivers and streams. Restoration of wetland hydrology required to the extent feasible. 25% incentive payment to restore hydrology (dirt work). Maximum 3 to 1 upland to wetland ratio. Seed to 4 species grass & legume mix. SD allocation is 3000 ac. |
| CP23A | C | Wetland Restoration, Non-Floodplain | No | **327 657** | 10 to 15 | | NO SIP | NO PIP | $4/ac | Beginning 10/01/04. Outside of 100 year floodplains. May include a buffer if needed to protect the wetland. Not to exceed 4 to 1 ratio of buffer to wetland. 25% incentive payment to restore hydrology. Apply this practice to land that is not eligible for enrollment in the FWP. SD allocation is 33,000 ac. |
| CP24 | C | Cross Wind Trap Strips | No | **589C** | 10 | | | 40% of the installation costs | $4/ac | Wind erosion EI => 4. Must have at least 2 strips, not to exceed 10 % of the total field acreage. Each strip shall be a minimum of 15 feet wide, and not exceed 25 feet in width. Maintain a minimum of 12 inches in height. |
| CP25 | Gen | Rare and Declining Habitat | No | **643** | 10 to 15 | | | | $4/ac | Only applies to eastern South Dakota, the tallgrass prairie and the northern mixed grass prairie. Must plant 8 species of native grass and 7 native forbs. Minimum size of 5 acres to meet standards. |
| CP27 | C | Farmable Wetlands Pilot - Wetlands | No | **657** | 10 to 15 | 20% | $10/ac/yr Max $100 | 40% of the installation costs | $4/ac | Individual wetlands must be <=10 acres (tract basis). Only earn payment on 5 acres. Cropping history 3 out of 10 years (1996 - 2005). PC's eligible, must have hydrology restored to maximum extent possible. Cannot be wetlands in a 100 year floodplain or associated with a perennial stream. |
| CP28 | C | Farmable Wetlands Pilot - Buffer | No | **327 393** | 10 to 15 | 20% | $10/ac/yr Max $100 | 40% of the installation costs | $4/ac | May not exceed the greater of 3 times the size of the eligible wetland, or an average width of 150 feet surrounding the wetland. Minimum of 30 feet. Max. acreage of 40 acres per tract (wetlands plus buffers) Must have both CP27 & CP28. Each associated buffer must not exceed the size limitation. |
| CP29 | C | Marginal Pastureland - Wildlife Habitat Buffer | No | **390 645** | 10 to 15 | 20% | $10/ac/yr Max $100 | 40% of the installation costs | $4/ac $8 or $9/ac | Adjacent to streams and permanent water. Minimum width of 20 feet, maximum average width of 120 feet. The natural vegetation for the site is a mix of grasses, shrubs, and forbs. Must treat a water quality concern. Can C/S permanent fences to exclude livestock and watering facilities away from buffer. |
| CP30 | C | Marginal Pastureland - Wetland Buffer | No | **390** | 10 to 15 | 20% | $10/ac/yr Max $100 | 40% of the installation costs | $4/ac $8 or $9/ac | Adjacent to streams, permanent water and wetlands. Minimum width of 20 feet, maximum average width of 120 feet. Must treat a water quality concern. Can C/S permanent fences to exclude livestock and watering facilities away from buffer. |
| CP31 | C | Bottomland Timber Establishment on Wetlands | No | **612** | 14 to 15 | | NO SIP | NO PIP | $4/ac | **Only on 100 year floodplains** of permanent streams suitable for growing bottomland hardwood trees or adapted shrubs. Offer must have primarily (51%) hydric soils. Establish a minimum of 3 different mast (acorns, walnuts, etc.) producing hardwood trees and shrubs. Natural regeneration is not permitted. SD |
| CP32 | Gen | Expired CRP Hardwood Tree Planting on Marginal Pastureland | No | **612** | 10 | | NO SIP | NO PIP | | Land established to trees that was under CRP-1 that expired September 30, 2001 or before. Create openings of native grass best for wildlife (50 point cover) on 10 to 20 percent of the acreage. |
| CP33 | C | Habitat Buffers for Upland Birds (Bobwhite quail) | No @ | **327** | 10 | | $10/ac/yr Max $100 | 40% of the installation costs | $4/ac | Beginning 10/01/04. A monitoring and evaluation plan must be developed with USF&W. Min. 30 feet, max.120 feet wide. Should be located around the entire perimeter of field. Allow natural herb. succession and/or establish warm season native grasses and forbs. Only applicable to 8 South Southeast counties. SD |
| CP37 | C | Duck Nesting Habitat | No | **327 657 645** | 10 to 15 | | NO SIP | NO PIP | $4/ac | Beginning 10/2/06. Up to 10 to 1 upland to wetland ratio in east river SD with >25 duck nesting pairs/acre. Wetlands must be outside the 100 year floodplain. The site's hydrology must be restored. Vegetation in the wetland area will either be seeded or allowed to re-vegetate naturally. Seed upland to DNC best for wildlife. |

Gen* = eligible for Continuous CRP **only** if the land is within an EPA approved Wellhead Protection Program area. The offer must be within a 2000 foot radius of the wellhead. Incentive payments only apply to continuous CRP offers.

@ Incidental grazing allowed, subject to COC approval, if normal gleaning of the crop residue in the field occurs. Reduce annual payment by 25%. Must remove livestock within 2 months.

Managed haying & grazing is allowed 1 out of every 3 years outside of the primary nesting season. Cannot do both on the same acreage. Reduce annual payment by 25%. New contracts approved after 9/25/06 can hay only 1 year out of 10 or graze only 1 year out of 5.

**CP22** - On cropland or marginal pastureland immediately adjacent and parallel to streams, lakes, wetlands and other permanent water bodies. **Zone 1** must be established to native trees and shrubs. Predominant vegetation in **zone 2** will be trees and shrubs suitable to the site. Min. of zone 1 plus zone 2 is 35 feet. **Zone 3** of native grass may be added; not to exceed 20 ft. on marginal pastureland. Maximum average combined width of zones 1, 2, & 3 shall not exceed 180 feet.
Can C/S plastic mulch or drip irrigation if the average annual precipitation is 25 inches or less. Protect from fire and livestock grazing. Can C/S permanent fences to exclude livestock and watering facilities away from riparian forest buffer.

**All CRP must have cropping history 4 out of 6 years (1996 - 2001), except FWP which is any 3 out of the previous 10 years.**

Figure 19. South Dakota CRP Acres by Conservation Practice as of 11/30/07.

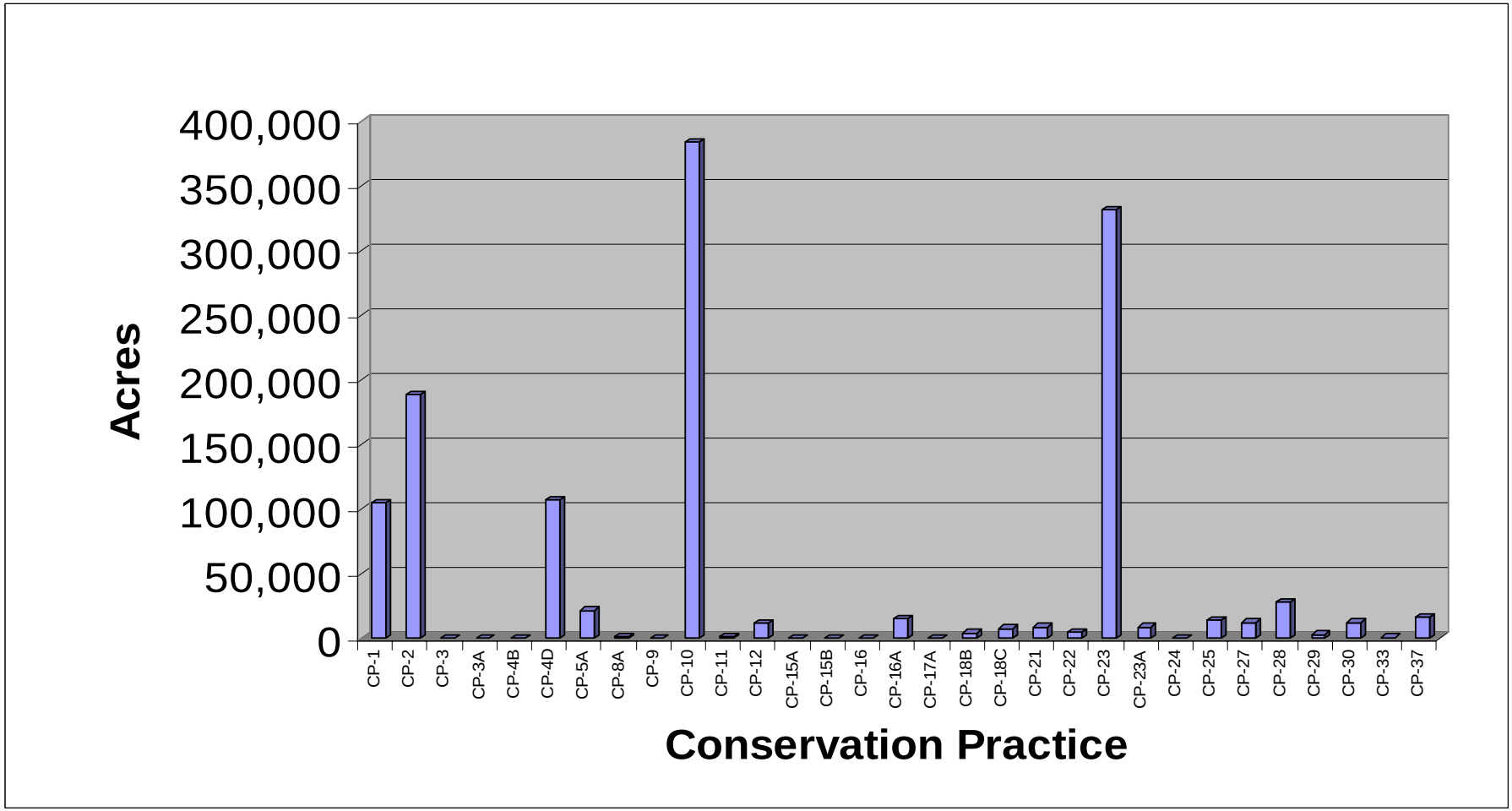


Figure 20. EQIP Acres in South Dakota as of 3/1/07.

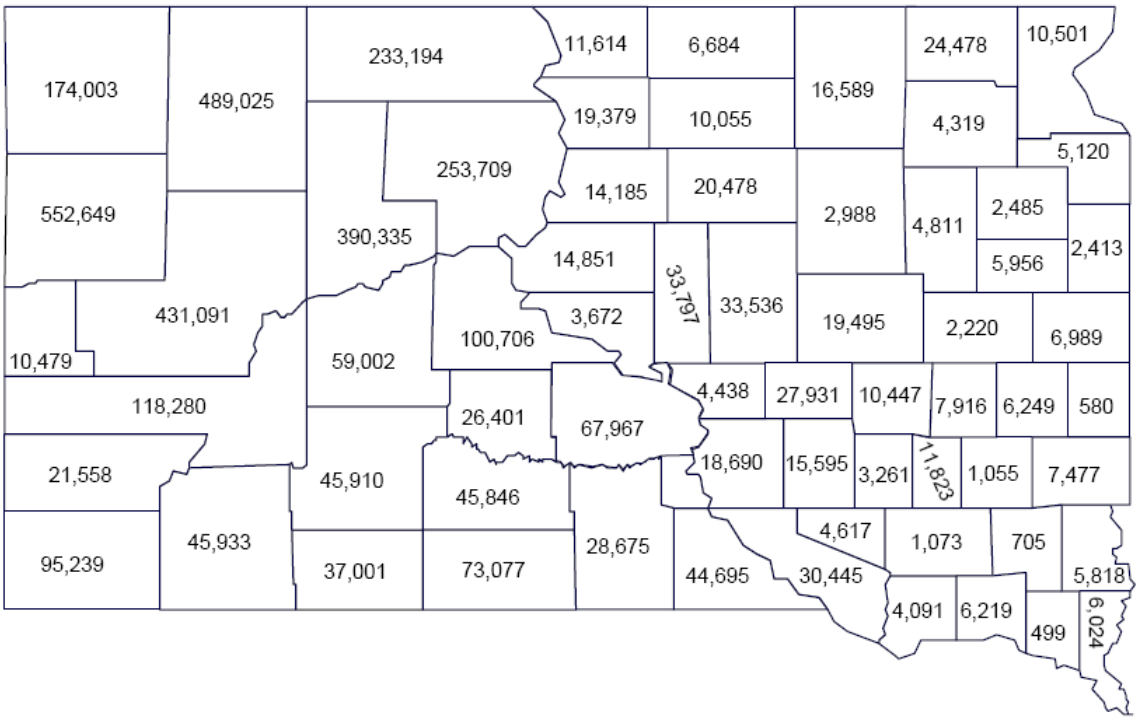



Figure 21. GRP Acres in South Dakota as of 3/1/07.

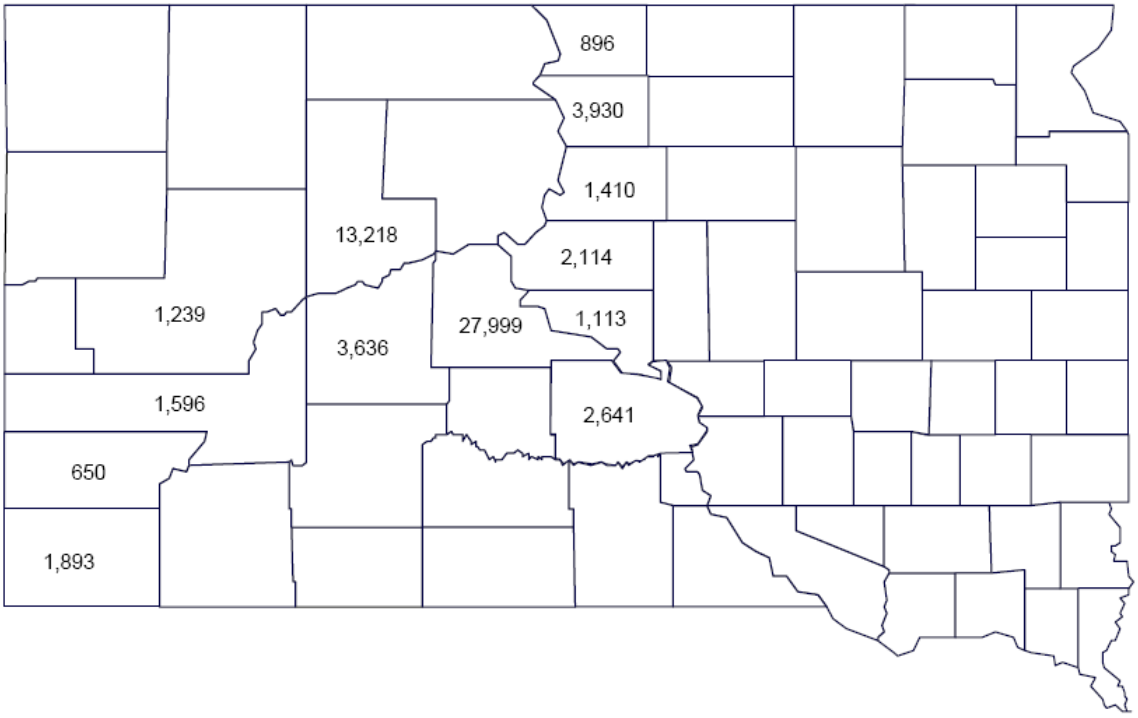


Figure 22. WHIP Acres Enrolled in South Dakota 2004-2006.

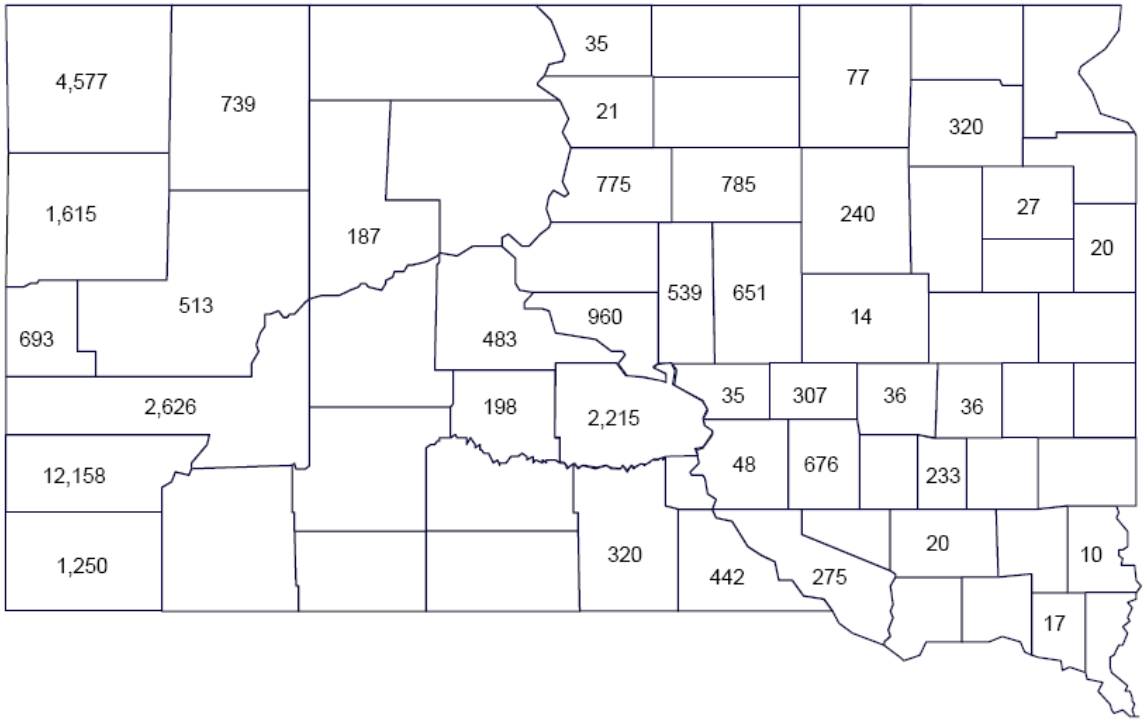



Figure 23. WRP Acres in South Dakota as of 3/1/07.

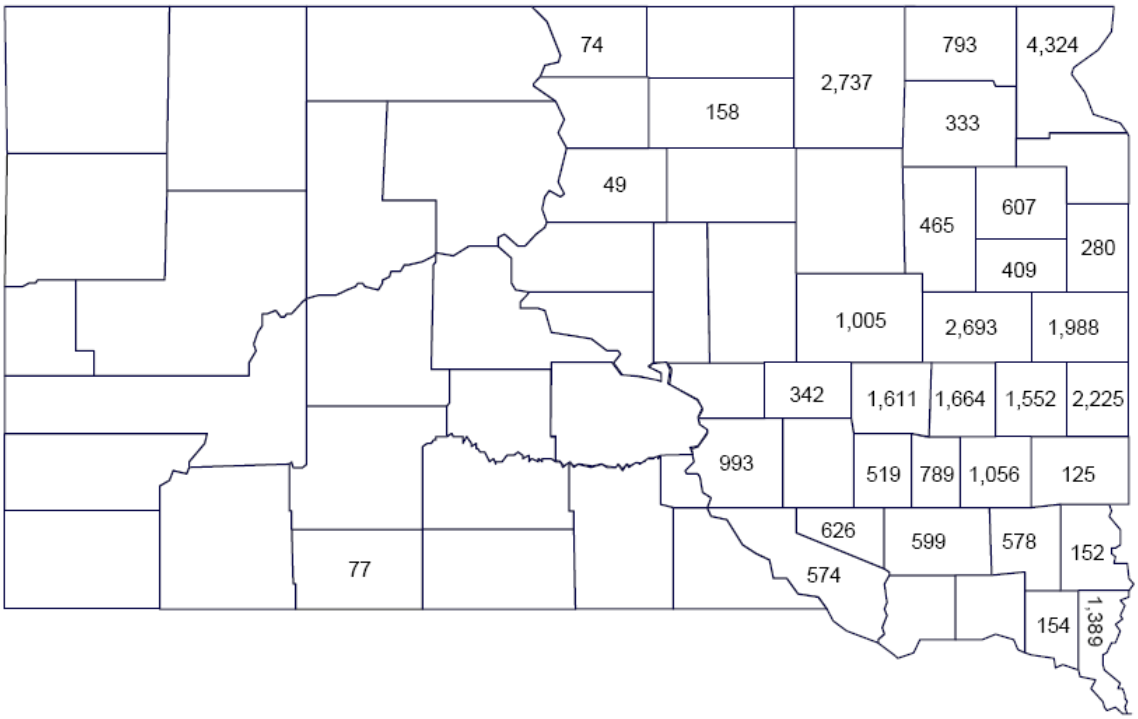


Figure 24. Native Grassland Conversion in South Dakota's Prairie Pothole Region (2002-2007).

**Top 10 Counties by Acres**

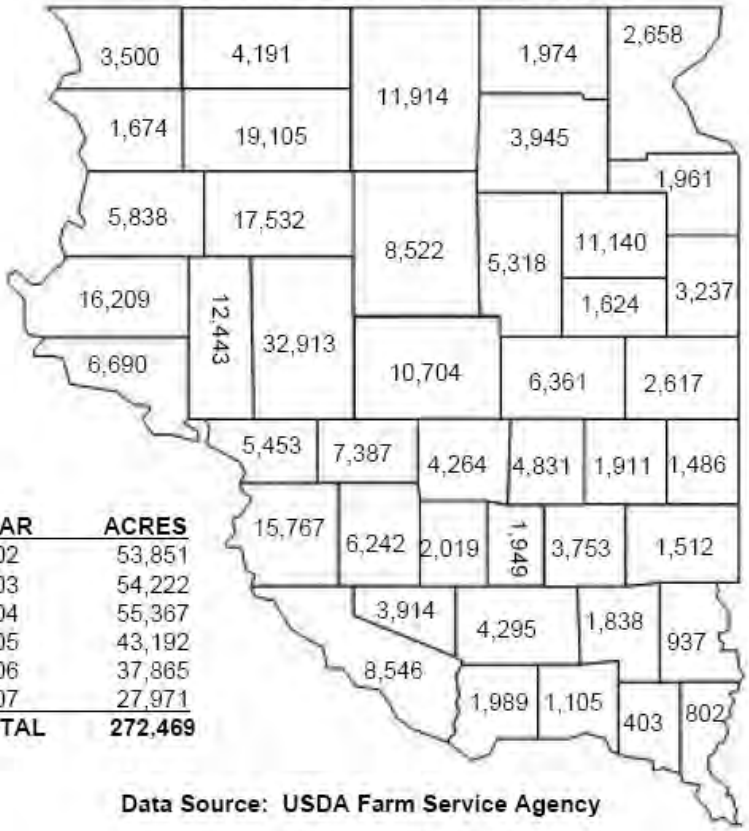
| | |
|---|---|
| Hand | 32,913 |
| Edmunds | 19,105 |
| Faulk | 17,532 |
| Sully | 16,209 |
| Brule | 15,767 |
| Hyde | 12,443 |
| Brown | 11,914 |
| Codington | 11,140 |
| Beadle | 10,704 |
| Charles Mix | 8,546 |

**Top 10 Counties by Percent of Total Land Base**

| | |
|---|---|
| Hand | 3.58% |
| Brule | 3.01% |
| Faulk | 2.74% |
| Edmunds | 2.61% |
| Codington | 2.53% |
| Sully | 2.52% |
| Hyde | 2.26% |
| Jerauld | 2.18% |
| Buffalo | 1.81% |
| Hughes | 1.41% |

| YEAR | ACRES |
|---|---|
| 2002 | 53,851 |
| 2003 | 54,222 |
| 2004 | 55,367 |
| 2005 | 43,192 |
| 2006 | 37,865 |
| 2007 | 27,971 |
| **TOTAL** | **272,469** |

**South Dakota's Prairie Pothole Region**




**Data Source: USDA Farm Service Agency**

# APPENDIX

Appendix 1. Press release from GFP News (November 30, 2007) regarding the 30-day comment period on the draft Private Lands Habitat & Access Programs—Strategic Plan.

**GFP Seeking Comments on Private Lands Habitat And Access Strategic Plan**

HURON, S.D. – With approximately 80 percent of South Dakota's land base under private ownership, the S.D. Game, Fish and Parks Department has a keen interest in working with private landowners to implement habitat practices and provide public access. As the state agency responsible for managing the wildlife resources and their associated habitats, GFP is currently seeking public comment on the "Private Lands Habitat & Access Programs—Strategic Plan."

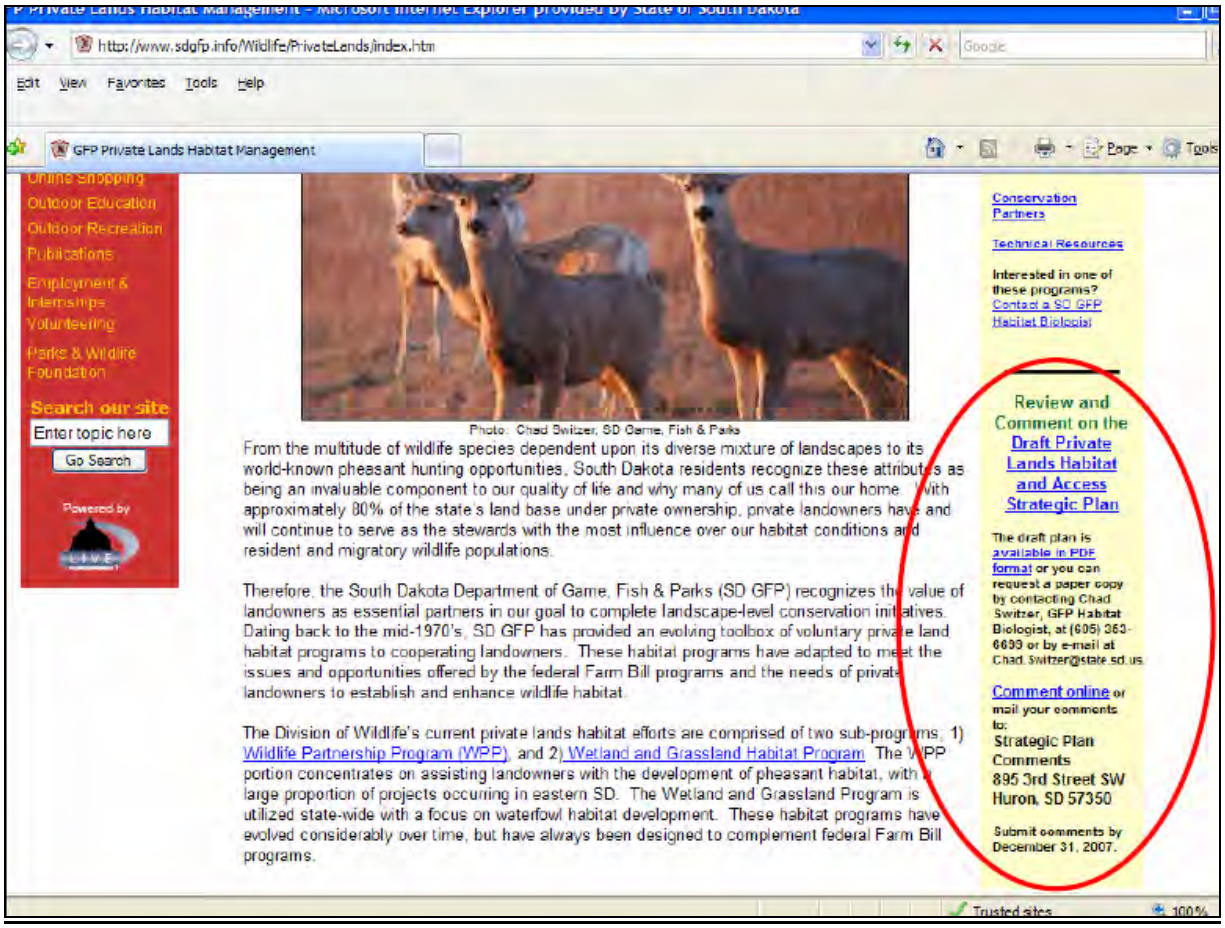
Since the mid-1970s, GFP has provided technical and financial assistance to private landowners to develop and manage wildlife habitat. During the past 30 years, habitat programs have evolved to meet the interests of GFP, private landowners and to take advantage of federal programs, such as the Conservation Reserve Program to address habitat needs and opportunities.

"An important component of this planning procedure is consideration of the broad spectrum of social values and beliefs held by South Dakota landowners and the general public," said GFP Habitat Biologist Chad Switzer of Huron. "Whether you're a landowner with 10 or 10,000 acres, enjoy outdoor activities, or are simply a citizen with wildlife habitat interests, we want to hear your comments and suggestions on the draft of this strategic plan that will guide GFP's effort in the future."

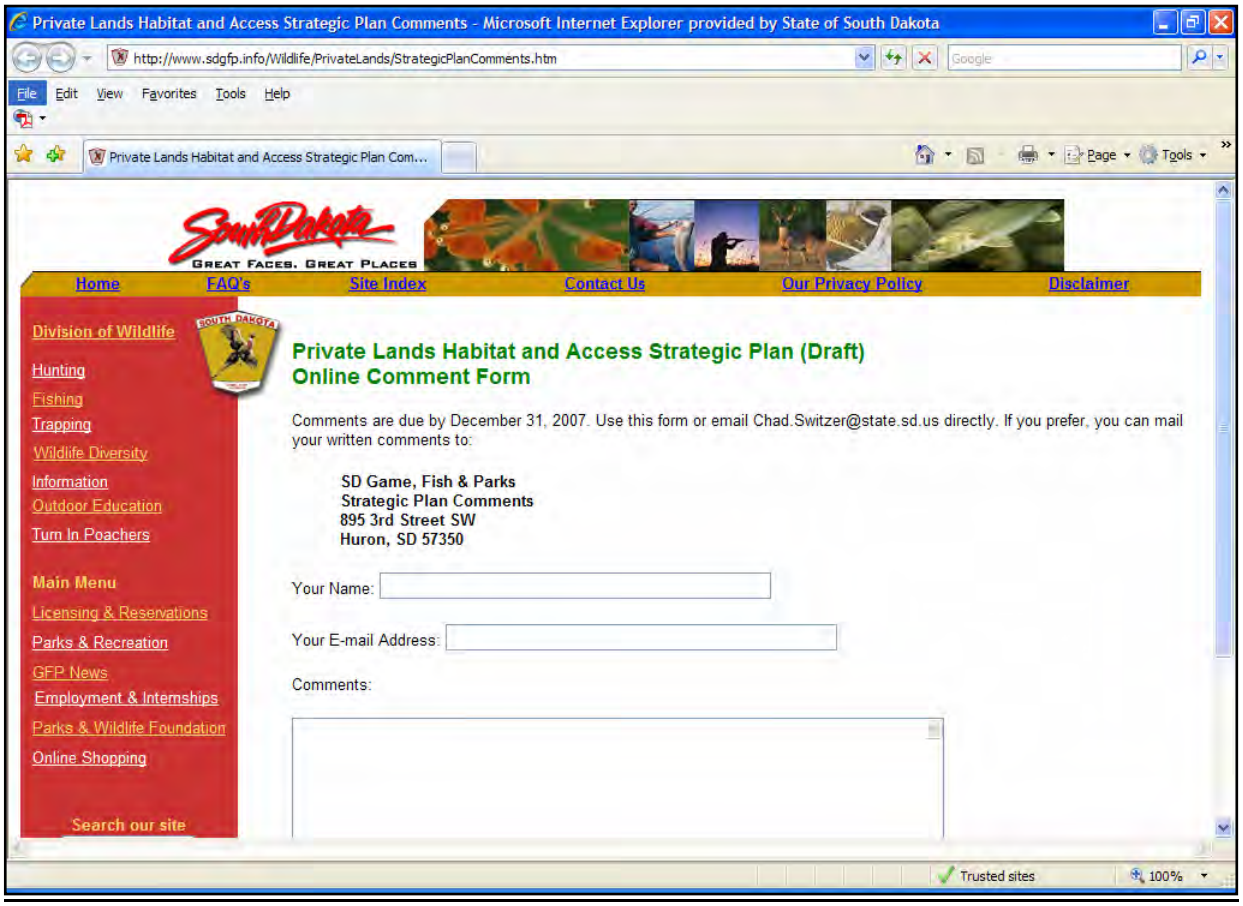
Those who wish to comment on the draft plan must have written comments submitted by Dec. 31, 2007. The draft plan is available in PDF format online at http://www.sdgfp.info/Wildlife/privatelands/Index.htm. You can also request a paper copy by contacting Chad Switzer at (605) 353-6699 or by e-mail at Chad.Switzer@state.sd.us. Please submit written comments to: S.D. Game, Fish and Parks, Strategic Plan Comments, 895 Third Street SW, Huron, SD 57350, or by using the online comment form at http://stage.sdgfp.info/Wildlife/privatelands/StrategicPlanComments.htm.

--GFP--

Appendix 2. Request for public comment announced on SD GFP Private Lands Habitat & Access Program webpage.



Appendix 3. Online comment form for public to provide comments on the draft Private Lands Habitat & Access Programs—Strategic Plan.



Appendix 4. Correspondence sent to SD GFP conservation partners seeking comments on the draft Private Lands Habitat & Access Programs—Strategic Plan.

Strategic Plan Comments - Message (Rich Text)

Reply | Reply to All | Forward

File Edit View Insert Format Tools Actions Help

Type a question for help

From: Switzer, Chad

Sent: Tue 11/27/2007 2:09 PM

To: 'jared.nwtf@yahoo.com'; 'pbauman@tnc.org'; kurt_forman@fws.gov; 'boyd_schulz@fws.gov'; 'Rick Warhurst'; 'Ben Bigalke'; 'Jim Madsen'; 'Campbell, Daryl - Huron, SD'; 'janet.oertly@sd.usda.gov'; Winter, Wayne; Jahraus, Pete; 'SD Assn of Conservation Districts'; Williams, Mike; 'faulstich@sbtc.net'; 'lbaesler@rmef.org'; 'Luebke, Kevin - Huron, SD'; limmer@itctel.com; 'sdwf@mncomm.com'

Cc: Switzer, Chad; Coughlin, Paul; Gigliotti, Larry; Kirschenmann, Tom; Koth, Ron; McCrea, Don; Murano, Rocco; Norton, Mark; Ode, Dave; Olson, Tim (GFP); Smith, Bill

Subject: Strategic Plan Comments

Conservation Partners:

The Division of Wildlife has recently completed putting together a draft of our Private Lands Habitat & Access Program Strategic Plan. Later this week through a news release will be seeking public comment on the plan, but we wanted to get this out to our conservation partners for their review. Please submit written comments by December 31, 2007 to Chad.Switzer@state.sd.us or SD Game, Fish & Parks, Strategic Plan Comments, 895 3rd Street SW, Huron, SD 57350. If you would like a paper copy, please provide your mailing address and we will get a copy to you. We appreciate you taking the time to review and provide input. Also, please feel free to pass along to whomever else might have an interest. Thank you.

PRIVATE LANDS ABITAT & ACCESS..

**Chad Switzer, Habitat Biologist**
**South Dakota Dept. of Game, Fish & Parks**
895 3rd Street SW
Huron, SD 57350
Office: (605) 353-6699
Cell: (605) 350-1725
Fax: (605) 353-7196
E-mail: Chad.Switzer@state.sd.us

***"Visit http://www.sdgfp.info/Wildlife/privatelands/Index.htm to learn more about SD GFP Private Lands Habitat Program"***

Appendix 5. Summary of comments submitted on the draft copy of the strategic plan during comment period (November 30, 2007—December 31, 2007).

**Agencies/Organizations/Individuals that submitted comments:**
Anonymous
Doug Block
William Brooks
Gordon Heber
Mark Norton
Dick Pearson
National Wild Turkey Federation—South Dakota Chapter
South Dakota Cattlemen's Association
USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

**COMMENT #1:** (Submitted by Dick Pearson)
Hi. My name is Dick Pearson and I'm a landowner in Day County (480 acres). I've tried to open the online comment site without success so rather than submit a snail mail comment I send this to you. Took a drive in my area around Roslyn last night and to say the 'face' of the area is changing would be a gross understatement. I view any loss of CRP as harmful to wildlife and had heard quite a bit of land was going out of CRP but had no idea of the extent and the devastating consequences(in my view)to all wildlife in our area. A scorched earth attack on wildlife is what my drive showed me. I note some of it includes lands previously in the Walk-In Program. Regardless, my comment is that the State MUST increase financial benefits to landowners ASAP to at least slow down future withdrawals from CRP and to aid those of us who have agreed to stay, or are considering staying, in the program even though at an economic loss. Whether through some sort of CRP supplemental payment per acre program, an increase in the $20 dollar an acre food plot payment(frankly a joke with skyrocketing fuel and other prices)or whatever, it will take more money to avoid further losses to wildlife. This isn't rocket science, only money will stop the foolish 'gold fever' rush to corn/ethanol.

Hopefully something can be done ASAP. Thanks.

**RESPONSE:** We at SD GFP fully recognize the importance CRP acres on the landscape, both in terms of wildlife habitat and quality public access. We too have seen the landscape level changes taking place across the state and view them with great concern. Quality nesting cover is the driving force behind upland bird and waterfowl populations in South Dakota when CRP acres are reduced these species will suffer. As an agency we are constantly looking for new ways to encourage wildlife habitat development on private lands. With high commodity prices and the demand for biofuels, it is challenging to make conservation-based payments competitive with grain farming or cash rent. We are currently looking at several ways to increase interest in the USDA CRP program and all options

are on the table. Thank you for your concern about the loss of CRP and wildlife habitat in general in the face of the demand for biofuel. Please know that as an agency this issue is of the highest importance.

**COMMENT #2:** (Submitted by National Wild Turkey Federation)
Thank you for allowing the National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTF) to provide input on the Private Lands Strategic Plan. I have reviewed the plan and first would compliment you and the other authors on the content of the plan. I have just a few comments on the plan. I did notice what I think is a typo on page 12, where Table 20 is referred to and I did not see a Table 20. As for the plan, it was informative for me to learn more about the history of your private lands programs and access programs, coming from a private lands background. I worked with Mark a lot prior to his departure and I have already begun working with Dave out of the Rapid City office to improve riparian areas. Riparian areas are, as you know, vitally important to many wildlife species, both game and non-game. Riparian areas in the Great Plains Steppe Ecoregion also are of high conservation priority in your agency's SWAP. The NWTF's Northern Plains Riparian Restoration Initiative aims to address the downward trend of riparian areas across the Northern Great Plains states and I think there exists many more partnership opportunities between GFP and the NWTF in South Dakota on riparian improvements. I was excited to see riparian areas receiving attention in your strategic plan, especially with regards to goals and strategies in the Great Plains Steppe Ecoregion and the Black Hills Ecoregion. These riparian areas are often the most under-managed habitats in many areas and they are vital in these ecoregions. I look forward to our continued partnership to improve riparian areas in these ecoregions. I also was interested to see that the funding you are receiving per the Mitigation Trust Fund can be used to secure access agreements across private lands to public lands. Access is another important issue for the NWTF and specifically the SD NWTF chapter. Please keep the NWTF in mind with regards to these access agreements.

It is a daunting task to address all the issues related to wildlife habitat management on private lands, especially in the face of an uncertain Farm Bill. I commend you on your efforts with this Strategic Plan. Please let me know if I can ever be of service to you in the implementation of private land goals, workshops, etc.

**RESPONSE:** Thank you for your constructive comments regarding this strategic plan. We too value the importance of riparian areas and are excited to improve these habitats whenever possible. We too see many partnership possibilities that do exist between our two agencies regarding riparian habitat improvements throughout South Dakota. We look forward to working with your agency on habitat access projects in the future.

**COMMENT #3:** (Submitted by Mark Norton)

Well done! I paged through it and found it well laid out and informational. I applaud your efforts both on the plan and on the new website. I like that the goals and strategies are set at a high bar. Also all of the tables towards the end of the plan are interesting and will be an excellent reference to look back on. Hopefully the habitat acres won't go down in history as the good ole days and we can regain and surpass them with the new farm bill. Good luck implementing this plan and building the habitat that will insure healthy populations of wildlife in SD for many years to come. If you build it they will come!

**RESPONSE:** Thank you for your kind words and positive feedback regarding our private land strategic plan. We too hope that an aggressive approach to private lands habitat work will help stem the tide of habitat loss currently observed across South Dakota's landscape. We look forward to seeing the conservation title to the new farm bill and share your hopes for conservation funding. Again thanks for your support.

**COMMENT #4:** (Submitted by Doug Block)
For the first time in many years I have had the opportunity to hunt on private lands through the GFP/private landowner walk in program. I was quite surprised and impressed to learn the amount of land that is available under this program as a significant supplement to already available public lands. Kudos for the effort and fruition of a program that seems a "win/win" for landowners, outdoors people and habitat. While it would not be any where near as politically popular, I suggest a very similar program could be developed for the few remaining virgin prairie lands whereby the public could physically wander, photograph etc. (not hunting) during the native flower bloom time period? It would not have to be vast tracts of land but rather a relatively few "high quality" prairie lands. Such would attract an entirely different public sector which can only serve to educate and support a broader base of sound land and water stewardship.

Speaking of resource stewardship, I must add that in my 40 plus years of being a SD resident that I have observed the concerning trend toward attempting to "fix" an environmental issue after the fact rather than "preventing" an environmental degradation. Of course much of this is often related to the ebb and flow of various administrations on both the state and federal level and the "sentiment" of private landowner rights and responsibilities at any given point in time. However, the trend in SD appears to me to place the utmost attention to private landownership "rights" with little or no regard to the correlating "responsibilities". Certainly there are many, perhaps even most, landowners that actually practice sound stewardship within the confines of economic realities. But as the saying goes, "it only takes a few rotten apples to spoil the basket". Inherent to its physical flow tendency, water quality in particular must be viewed as a "common" resource and managed accordingly.

As it relates to the GFP private lands and access plan, I have observed a glaring example whereby the GFP Sr. Mgt. has knowingly "looked the other way" to

allow a private developer to openly destroy and sever access to public waters and ecosystems. At the field level, the GFP itself has expressly opposed such actions and the previous GFP administration formally stopped such private developer actions even to the extent of succinctly documenting that not only would such activities be subject to various GFP approvals but that, "such actions are prohibited by statute and the Commission would not have authority to grant that which is prohibited by the Legislature". Unfortunately even though the GFP has not approved the environmental destruction and they acknowledge that such activities are in violation of state statute, they have knowingly allowed the activity to proceed unrestricted. Such seems grossly inconsistent with the stated GFP private lands habitat and access plan. It is a classic case of overlooking, "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure" and we can point to countless examples here in SD whereby lakes have been severely aged and deteriorated by poor private and public land management practices and we are now spending grossly disproportionate resources attempting to "clean up our mess". My request is that we first attempt to protect what is remaining and concurrently, but secondarily, attempt to revitalize what we have degraded.

Thank you for allowing me to share my comments and of course I need to support my assertions herein regarding present GFP actions. I would be pleased to present the significant documentation should such be requested after the full GFP Commission has had their opportunity to be briefed and respond at their January meeting. The plans comment deadline prompted me to correspond now rather than wait until the commission had an opportunity to review and reply.

**RESPONSE:** We are encouraged by your positive experiences hunting private lands through our Walk-In Area program. Through our access programs we are attempting to find new and innovative ways to maintain and increase acres available to public hunting. We agree with your premise that the public needs to better appreciate the beauty of native grassland habitats; these are some of our most valued treasures. We also echo your sentiments about fixing environmental problems before they become irreversible and/or costly to fix. Good land stewardship and a sense of responsibility to future generations are the only real ways to have landscape scale conservation and wildlife habitat on private lands.

**COMMENT #5:** (Submitted by USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service)
In reviewing the 13 items listed under Part VII, subpart A the following comments are made:

1) Invasive species is mentioned in item 13, but that is only in relation to global climate change. Item 3 is perhaps the place to list invasive species rather than in item 13. Invasive species are already here in South Dakota and we don’t need to wait for global climate change to address this issue. Further, global climate change might even be inserted under item 3.

2) It does appear that the bulk of the 13 items listed primarily refer to the human social and socio-economic dimension in terms of program issues regarding funding and delivery, public information, relationships between various involved entities and potential changes in agricultural production. I would suggest that item 13 is something of an outlier in that it addresses a topic incongruent with the rest of the item headings.

3) Item 3 does refer to habitat loss but not to habitat fragmentation. If habitat fragmentation is outside the scope of this document, surely global climate change is as well.

**RESPONSE:** Thank you for your thoughtful comment regarding our private lands strategic plan. Invasive species are of concern and currently being dealt with by all means necessary. We were attempting to address our concerns about additional invasive/exotic species creeping in from lower latitudes. As an agency we placed a heavy emphasis on many social and economic factors currently influencing wildlife habitats. We feel that these pressures are having the largest impact on wildlife populations through habitat loss and fragmentation.

**COMMENT #6:** (Submitted by William Brooks)
Teddy Roosevelt had a dream in saving large tracts of land to give the public a chance to hunt, and giving wildlife a chance to live and roam in their own habitat.

In eastern South Dakota we have small tracts with habitat thanks to SD GFP, US Government and landowners with a dream to give wildlife a place to roam. Drive down a road farmed up to the road edge, no wildlife in sight, then drive down a road with shelterbelts, CRP, State Game Production Walk-In Land, cattail sloughs and you see wildlife and habitat. With grain and land prices so high I see farmers drowning habitat to turn into farmland.

The SD GFP has done a good job creating habitat. I and wildlife want to thank you. I have given 30 acres of my land for habitat with shelterbelts, dams and native grasses. Build it and they will come.

I would love to learn more about nesting cover with help from SD GFP. If people disapprove of your job, have them hunt pheasants in a plowed field sometime.

**RESPONSE:** Thank you for your comment and concerns about wildlife habitats on private lands. We too see the tide turning on wildlife habitat to make way for row crops. Sentiments from landowners such as you drive most if not all private lands habitat programs. Your statement “if you build it and they will come” is dead on. Our private lands program strives to promote all habitat and conservation programs and will continue to expand this role through our strategic plan. I look forward to visiting with you about wildlife habitat options on your property.

**COMMENT #7:** (Submitted by Gordon Heber)
I read through your Draft of the Private Lands Habitat & Access Programs Strategic Plan and found it to be very informative. Thanks for giving us an opportunity to comment.

As you know, I am a South Dakota native who grew up on a farm and from that experience learned to love the land, wildlife and hunting. I am the oldest of eight siblings who experienced the rewards but also the hardships of trying to make a living from farming. Because of those hardships I had a strong desire to make a better living so I sought higher education, paying my own way, and left South Dakota for a career. For 17 years I enjoyed a good career and saved a little money along the way. Then in the early 90's I, along with my family, decided to return to SD amid high hopes of returning to my farming roots.

I purchased my first parcel of land in 1993 and the second one in 1996 and by 2005 had six parcels of land totaling almost two sections. During that time I've gained a wealth of knowledge about habitat and how it relates to hunting. Eleven years ago, I started keeping a record of each hunt, noting who hunted with me, how many birds were harvested and where they were taken. The biggest surprise was that in every new purchase of land the number of birds harvested was low until some habitat was established and farming practices changed. Another surprise was how much hunting and habitat changed during the 17 years while I lived outside of SD.

Based on my experiences, here are some thoughts:

1. If we don't work at establishing and retaining habitat then the number of game birds and animals will diminish proportionally.
2. Sportsmen must share in the cost of providing the habitat that is needed for their hunting enjoyment.
3. Commercialization of hunting provides more habitat and hunting opportunities rather than subtracting from it.
4. Focus on the sport and quality of hunting rather than on hunting opportunities.
5. Work closely and be innovative with landowners who are willing to develop habitat on their land whether for hunting, observation or refuge.

**If we don't work at establishing and retaining habitat then the number of game birds and animals will diminish proportionally.**

Hunting opportunities were abundant during my early years in the 1960's. We hunted pheasants, ducks and jackrabbits frequently and with much success. We never dreamed that it could change so much in a few years. It was later, after I finished college at SDSU that I realized how much hunting changed. But I was

off to a career and other states so did not participate in hunting very much. When I returned to SD, hunting opportunities were improving but when I purchased land the hunting on that land was less that spectacular, in fact very poor. I turned to the GF&P and others for help and advice and so my project to improve habitat began. Fourteen years later, I'm still working at it.

Today, I offer excellent hunting for a wide variety of friends and acquaintances each year. As an example, in 1995 I did not have even one guest hunt on my land and I only harvested three pheasants. This year I've hosted numerous guests and enjoyed very good success.

**Sportsmen must share in the cost of providing the habitat that is needed for their hunting enjoyment**.

I feel that too many sportsmen expect others to foot the bill for the habitat that is needed for their hunting enjoyment. Fortunately the public policy to improve land and water conservation provides the necessary habitat. However beyond conservation efforts the financial incentives for providing habitat must come from sportsmen, if we are to at least maintain the hunting opportunities we enjoy today. I don't feel that it should be the GF&P's responsibility to provide free access and free hunting any more than the State should be responsible for providing free golfing.

**Commercialization of hunting provides more habitat and hunting opportunities rather than subtracting from it**

I don't feel that the controlled commercialization of hunting is necessarily bad for the hunting public. Too many of the hunting public assumes that if the landowner did not have a Preserve or fee hunting operation his land would still have ample habitat and be available for the general public to hunt for free. The simple fact of the matter is that without the income from sportsmen there would probably be little habitat on the land used for that purpose. Therefore the opportunities provided by the Hunting Preserves or fee hunting operations provide hunting enjoyment but not necessarily at the expense of those seeking to hunt for free.

**Focus on the sport and quality of hunting rather than on hunting opportunities.**

I feel that the GF&P's should place more focus on good hunting sportsmanship. Eliminating road hunting would help tremendously because the act of road hunting is not sporting and it causes irritation to the landowners who try to provide habitat for game birds. A good question to ask yourself is "can this hunting activity be shown on a Public Outdoor channel and be considered sporting to the viewing public"? I think that the answer to road hunting would be no. Times have changed and its time to change this archaic way of hunting. As a landowner, I try to establish habitat to draw game birds away from the road and

am motivated to establish hunting habitat far away from the road as possible so that the road hunters won't have as much temptation to hunt my land. This should not be.

I am encouraged by the number of deer stands that are going up each year. I feel that the GF&P's should encourage and recognize those who hunt deer from a blind.

**Work closely and be innovative with landowners who are willing to develop habitat on their land whether for hunting, observation or refuge.**

I feel that the focus should be to assist, encourage and provide incentives for landowners to establish and maintain habitat for wildlife and less emphasis on the goal to provide hunting opportunities for those unwilling to share in the cost of providing that habitat. If habitat were free than hunting could be free too but unfortunately those days are long gone. Unless something like ethanol causing a switch grass boom, hunting opportunities are probably going to depend largely on financial incentives in the future.

I tried to be an example for the Game, Fish & Parks by obtaining land, developing habitat with the help of various programs and then offering free hunting opportunities to many individuals. The walk-in program does not work for me because I want to enjoy my land for hunting on a personal level too. As a landowner who purchased land, developed habitat for wildlife and offer free hunting opportunities, I've learned never to give anyone permission without my personal supervision because unsupervised hunters will sometimes:

1. Stray onto the neighbors land
2. Bag more than that allowed by the game laws
3. Shoot animals other than that expected such as cats, rabbits or even worse a protected bird
4. Invite their friends along so the group is larger than expected
5. Drive on the property too much
6. Leave garbage
7. Take marginal shots thus wounding too many birds
8. Fail to kennel dogs when snow is too deep making pheasants susceptible to being caught by the dogs

Another thing that I've learned is that when someone calls to ask for permission to hunt and it's granted the hunter assumes the permission is for ever and for all of their friends. For example, just last night a person who has land next to mine, but lives outside the county, called to say "I'm going to be hunting the doe season tomorrow and wonder if it's ok if I shoot a doe on your land if I see one"?. More than likely, if I had granted permission, this person would have shot a doe on my land from the road or driven out into the land and shot from his pickup. Plus he would have extended my permission to include his adult son and anyone

else hunting with him, not just for the day granted but for the remainder of the season. In addition he would have likely shot a doe on my land, again from the road, the following year assuming that I would not mind since I gave him permission during the previous season.

I did grant permission to hunt deer during the regular season to another neighbor who was showing an interest in building a deer blind like one of mine. He hunted during the evening and then again the next morning but only in the blind. This neighbor is planting trees and new grass this spring so we have a common interest and he wants to develop his land like I did.

Despite all the challenges, I do not regret purchasing land, developing habitat and offering hunting opportunities to many individuals for free. It's been very rewarding to me personally and I appreciate all of the assistance that the various Conservation Groups and the Game, Fish & Parks have provided over the years. I only hope that our efforts will continue to provide enjoyment for generations to come. This year alone I've hosted 63 individual hunting days and taken 38 different individuals hunting including four youngsters on youth weekend. I shared deer hunting with five individuals and we harvested four nice bucks and one doe.

Some suggestions:

**Offer some flexibility for landowners such as myself to accept limited financial assistance from my guests for new habitat projects**.

I try to host as many hunts as reasonable possible but sometimes I have other obligations or other things to do. As noted above I will not allow guests to hunt on my land without supervision although I have on a few occasions but with only individuals I trust completely. Also I limit my group size to absolutely no more than eight and prefer the number to be four hunters or less when possible. I do this because once the group gets to be more than four it starts to feel like work and once the group size exceeds eight my own personal enjoyment diminishes quickly. As a consequence, some of my land is underutilized from a hunting standpoint. From a nesting, winter survival and rearing perspective my habitat projects improve the wildlife population on the surrounding properties regardless of the hunting pressure on my own land.

I feel that it would be a win-win situation if I could take advantage of some of the landowner habitat programs offered by the Game, Fish & Parks and still receive limited financial assistance from my guests to be used for additional habitat establishment on my own land. While I have more habitat than I need for my own personal enjoyment and that of my friends and guests, I've found that developing habitat is even more enjoyable than hunting and so I want to continue that activity.

**Partner with other organizations for woody habitat cost-share.**

I recommend that we allow participants in the Woody Habitat program to piggy-back with other cost-share partners. Improving Woody habitat is a big project for anyone and any additional cost-share assistance should be helpful. For example, Pheasant Country in Mitchell offers a small cost-share assistance program for those seeking to add woody habitat. I would like to see GF&P's partner with organizations such as Pheasant Country to offer additional assistance to landowners.

**Recognize that those who conduct a fee hunting operation are helping provide hunting for the general public too**.

Sometimes I feel that the GF&P's considers the general public to be only someone who does not help pay for the opportunity to hunt. Despite the significant financial help from various organizations to develop habitat on my land, I still have thousands of dollars of my own money invested. For example, I have three tree belts planted in the mid and late 1990's that cost more than $15,000 not including my own time. With the approximately $5,000 in assistance I still have about $10,000 of my own money invested not including the many hours mowing, replanting and spraying. Starting in 1996 I've taken 100's of individuals hunting on my land entirely for free. I feel that the GF&P's should recognize that individuals like me invest thousands of dollars and that it is OK to accept financial assistance from those that share in the benefits. I feel that landowners and hunters need to partner together to help fund the habitat that is necessary for continued pheasant populations. Too often, it seems, the general hunting public expects landowners to provide the habitat and then to allow them to hunt it for free. As part of the education process I feel that the GF&P's should help educate the hunting public about the costs of providing habitat and that partnering with landowners for hunting opportunities is a way to help fund that habitat.

Thanks again for giving me an opportunity to comment on your strategic plan. It's been a pleasure working with you and GF&P over the years as we developed habitat on my land. The results greatly exceeded my expectations and as a result I've enjoyed tremendous satisfaction in sharing my good fortune with numerous friends and acquaintances as well as some youth hunters. Again thanks.

**RESPONSE:** We are happy to hear of your successes developing habitat and increasing wildlife populations on your property. We are also happy to hear of your positive experiences working with our agency along with others on your land.

Habitat acres have expanded and contracted several times over the last 50 years, you are correct that the late 90's to present represent a high tide in wildlife habitat (in particular nesting cover).

Sportsmen and women as consumptive users should and do bear responsibility for funding of conservation and access programs. Sportsmen's dollars pay for the majority of our private lands programs including grass seeding, Walk-In Area, FWP incentive payments, as well as the woody habitat program that you have taken advantage of. The general public at large, including sportsmen, also supports federal USDA conservation programs like CRP, WRP, WHIP, and EQIP.

Since wildlife is a public resource, landowners who allow free hunting access are important. Free and quality access to the public wildlife resource is one of SD GFP's highest priorities. Walk-In Area access agreements are paid partially through a $5 surcharge on most hunting licenses in South Dakota.

You are correct, commercial hunting operations often do have quality wildlife habitat on their property. They are businesses selling access to public resources, and if they didn't have any habitat people would not pay for this access. It is our view that SD GFP shouldn't use sportsman's dollars on projects that they would have to pay to access. If habitat work is making the operation money, that work will be done regardless of cost-share. Again, free access to the public resource is of highest priority for this agency. With limited budgets, we as an agency must prioritize projects in favor of non-commercial hunting operations.

Although a contentious issue for some people, road hunting is made legal through state statute and affirmed by the courts. Please contact you local legislator if you have additional comments and concerns regarding road hunting.

Through our private lands program we strive to provide both technical and financial assistance to landowners willing to provide wildlife habitat. Anyone that buys hunting licenses, hunting equipment, and ammunition is paying for a significant portion of private land and public lands habitat and access programs. Public wildlife resources should not be accessible solely by those who own land or are willing to pay for access. Of course, it is your choice whether or not to participate in any state or federal program, including the Walk-In Area program. Access programs are not for everyone. We feel that the success and demand for the Walk-In Area program speaks for itself.

There may be other options available for habitat development on commercial hunting operations. Because we use sportsman's dollars to fund SD GFP's private lands habitat programs, we will not fund WPP habitat projects that will be used for commercial hunting. As more and more land becomes commercialized, it is even more important to concentrate on those lands where free and reasonable access is offered.

We currently cost-share and “piggy back” our private lands woody cover program with several partners including CCRP, Conservation districts, and others. When this is done the assistance from the other agency is subtracted from the bill to be cost-shared by SD GFP. For instance is a tree bill is $1,000 and a district grant pays $200.00 SD GFP will pay for 75% of the remaining $800.00. This is especially useful when adding rows to 5 row CP 5a CCRP windbreaks, giving more “bang” for the sportsman’s dollar.

SD GFP considers anyone who buys a hunting license and participates in the tradition of hunting a member of the general hunting public. Millions of sportsman’s dollars have been spent on private lands habitat projects over the last 30 years. You have a personal interest in habitat development that is commendable. Many others in the general public do not share you enthusiasm for wildlife and habitat development. It is fortunate that private landowners like yourself have access to like minded sportsman’s habitat dollars to finance projects on your property.

**COMMENT #8:** (Submitted by South Dakota Cattlemen’s Association)
South Dakota Cattlemen’s Association (SDCA) is please to provide comments on South Dakota Game, Fish & Parks (SDGFP) Private Lands Habitat and Access Strategic Plan. In reviewing the document, we have some specific comments and some general comments.

General Comments:

SDCA appreciates recognition that lands owned and managed by private individuals and entities contribute significantly to wildlife habitat, particularly in the area of hunting development and access. SDCA members are proud of their land stewardship and strive to maintain and expand wildlife habitat. They also appreciate the ability to access conservation cost-share programs to enhance wildlife habitat while solving management issues on their farms and ranches. These mutually beneficial programs are key to the continued development of crucial wildlife habitat on private lands and SDCA opposes “free” public access as a condition for receipt of cost-share funds for conservation projects.

SDCA supports free enterprise solutions to issues surrounding public access to private property and encourages regulatory agencies to work with landowners to create methods based on free enterprise to achieve habitat development and public access goals. Hunters and the general public need to understand that significant resources will be required to acquire and maintain SD GFP goals and they will be expected to fund activities that provide public benefit. Landowners will expect significant incentives to offset costs associated with deferred haying and grazing to compete with other land use priorities. SDCA policy supports rental payments to landowners rather than public land acquisitions.

SDCA concurs with the statement that the 2007 Farm Bill will have an impact on wildlife habitat and public access. We have long supported increased funding and access for conservation programs. Likewise the recently passed Energy Bill may have significant impacts on habitat and access. SDCA is disappointed that the Energy Bill does not support harvest of bio-mass for cellulosic ethanol production from national forests. This would enhance wildlife habitat on these lands also.

SDCA concurs with the plan's assessment that non-resident landowners and commercial hunting operations will continue to impact public hunting access. SDCA supports a landowner's right to manage their property in a responsible manner that meets their goals for their property and their business. GFP should not hinder this right and needs to institute some type of landowner sponsored big game license program.

Future access for the public on private land will depend more and more upon hunters and GFP developing long term relationships with landowners. The *"Landowners Matter"* newsletter is a start toward providing a communication bridge between these groups. Those wishing to access private land in the future must start building landowner relationships well before the opening day of hunting season. A recurring theme in the plan is working with NGO's, however there is no mention of working with producer/landowner organizations to implement the goals and objectives of the plan. Over the years there have been well intentioned suggestions for hunters to assist landowners with fencing or other chores. Many times it can turn out to be more work for the landowner than it is worth.

Specific Comments:

In the document, it appears no landowners, producer groups nor the South Dakota Department of Agriculture were represented on the planning team and little input was taken or received from those entities. SDCA recognizes participation form individual landowners may be difficult to achieve the inherent constraints on their time and resources. However, if the strategic plan is to be successfully implemented, GFP will need the participation and buy-in from private landowners, many of whom are agricultural producers.

In the historical review section under Riparian Pastures on page 13, there is somewhat inflammatory statement: *"Riparian areas provide important habitat for many wildlife species statewide, and are arguably the most important, yet most under-managed and even abused habitat in the western half of the state."* SDCA acknowledges there are areas on both sides of the Missouri river that would benefit from better management. However, this statement does not contribute to better landowner relations. It is unfair to single out west-river landowners while ignoring the fact there are many riparian areas east of the river totally devoid of woody vegetation. It would also be quite successfully argued

that west river public lands overrun with uncontrolled prairie dog populations are the most abused lands in South Dakota.

The walk-in areas present both challenges and opportunities for landowners and hunters alike. SDCA members have issues with walk-in area management, or the lack thereof. This lack of management is contributing to fewer numbers of wildlife in certain areas. Managed haying and grazing of these areas are a critical component of a healthy ecosystem. Adjacent native pasture and rangelands can provide superior habitat during haying and grazing and compliment the walk-in areas. Walk-in areas may also be a cause of conflict with adjacent landowners who often deal with unscrupulous hunters that utilize deceptive tactics to gain access to their property. Many landowners have heard the excuse for trespassing that involves an injured animal seeking refuge on neighboring land. It is imperative for hunters to respect the landowners' private property rights while pursuing their game or private lands access will be further impeded.

In addition, the GFP should develop a process for landowners and/or GFP to screen and reject hunters accessing these or other private lands access areas. Unlimited public access devalues hunting for everyone using the property.

While SDCA supports the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) to enhance wildlife habitat, we oppose the CRP-CP30 program because it creates a disincentive for landlords to continue renting adjacent pastures to cattle producers due to the rental rates that are above market value of the parcels.

SDCA also has concerns with statements suggesting conversion of cropland to switchgrass for cellulosic ethanol production will be a good thing. Any expanded biofuels production that relies on cropland to produce fuel that contains no livestock feed byproduct and reduces acres available for feed and forage production will be seen as detrimental.

SDCA concurs with the concern about loss of habitat due to breaking of native rangeland and pastureland for cropping purposes and supports the sod saver provision in the farm bill.

While the goals and objectives of the plan are generally admirable, they are woefully inadequate to provide enough public access to make a real difference.

Suggestions:

1. GFP should seek to acquire adequate funding from sportsmen and wildlife organizations to fund public access on private lands at a rate adequate to incentivize landowner participation at a level that meets demand for access.

2. Place a moratorium on land acquisitions. Public funds should be used for programs that incentivize private landowners not land purchases that compete with private interests.
3. Manage walk-in and other public access areas to enhance habitat by allowing managed haying and/or grazing, harvesting of crops and or residue and timber products.
4. Develop a process to screen and limit hunters on public access areas.
5. Institute landowner sponsored licenses.
6. Increase the number of special buck tags for out of state hunters based on supply and demand. Use this revenue to assist in funding public access programs.
7. Give preference to big game license applications with a landowner sponsor.
8. Support landowner's prerogative to establish commercial hunting operations that will inherently improve wildlife habitat.

Thanks again for the opportunity to comment on the strategic plan. Please contact our office at 605.945.2333 if we can be of further assistance.

**RESPONSE:** Thank you for your general and specific comments on our private lands strategic plan. We recognize that the goals of our respective organizations share many common interests, including better management and stewardship of grassland resources in South Dakota.

SD GFP recognizes the importance of the South Dakota ranching community's impact on both wildlife populations and hunting access. "Free and reasonable access" is a stipulation to all WPP private lands habitat work. It is not reasonable to use sportsmen's dollars to conduct work on private lands that they will in turn have to pay for access. SD GFP recognizes that fish and wildlife resources in South Dakota are free and public. Subsidizing commercial hunting operations would only serve to reduce public access to this public resource.

We recognize that in order to maintain wildlife habitats and wildlife population's producers often make significant financial sacrifices. We as an agency are constantly trying to come up with new and innovative way to help offset these economic realities. We look forward to working with your organization in the future, highlighting our common interests and creating a win-win situation for ranchers and sportsman. We also agree that long term, positive relationships are the key to providing needed wildlife management and hunter access.

Buy-in from private landowners is a vital component to our private lands habitat program. Forums such as this comment period provide us with much needed feedback and allow us to think in terms of landowners concerns. We appreciate your input and look forward to working with yours as well as many other landowner groups on private lands habitat concerns. You are quite correct in asserting that riparian management is not just a West River issue, we agree that

woody and herbaceous riparian vegetation is important to any landowner's wildlife management plan. Better management of these areas is one of the quickest and most cost effective means to improve wildlife habitat on private lands.

The Walk-In Area program has been a great success story for both hunters and landowners over the past decade. Most management on WIA is dictated by USDA managed haying and grazing stipulations on CRP lands. We do encourage maintaining undisturbed habitat on WIA's to allow for nesting and of course a place for hunters to have a reasonable chance of harvesting game. Areas hayed or grazed can of course be enrolled in the WIA program, but without the undisturbed habitat bonus.

The demand for biofuels is putting strains on land used for ranching and wildlife purposes. Demand for corn acres has and will continue to decrease hay and pasture acres available to ranchers. This coupled with increased corn prices puts a great strain on the cattle industry. SD GFP recognizes this trend and also supports the Sod Saver provision in the new Farm Bill. We also hope to assist your members with cost-share options to help make their ranching operations more profitable. Cellulosic ethanol whether it is from corn stocks, wood chips, or native grasses will be needed to create a long term sustainable biofuels industry.

Again thank you for your comments and concerns. We share many of the same goals and objectives and look forward to working with your organization in the future to better meet the needs of landowners, sportsmen, and wildlife.

**COMMENT #9:** (Anonymous)
I'm glad I had the opportunity to slowly read through the draft and digest its contents. I just wanted to relay a few of my thoughts regarding some of the issues in your strategic plan draft.

Speaking specifically from eastern South Dakota, there are certainly many challenges facing wildlife, primarily through habitat depletion. As you are aware, I've seen firsthand the destruction, as I call it, of our prairie grasslands. Just last year, a tract of prairie, near where I used to fish, was planted into soybeans and corn. You may know the land as being near what we call Kraft's dam. This fall, the owner began taking out the remaining fence lines so that he could plant just a little closer to the road and the creek that is the run-off into Kraft's dam.

What would prompt someone to convert prairie grassland into cropland? The answer, which I didn't read in your plan, but I will say it, is greed. In my opinion, there is no doubt about that. In this area, there is such a thirst for money that your own neighbor would sell you down the river for few more dollars in his pocket. I'm not exaggerating by much either. This has to stem directly from the Farm Bill. I'm all for conservation programs from the federal government, but the payments these farmers are receiving for their crops are too much. The Farm

Bill is nothing more than welfare for farmers. Have you met a 1,000 or more acre crop farmer driving an old Dodge?

I know that you can't do anything regarding the Farm Bill, but it does help to vent a little. Regarding the other issues in your draft, there seems to be two prominent thoughts: habitat rehabilitation and landowner cooperation. I can imagine that both are becoming increasingly more difficult. I don't have the answer to either one. I read the *Range* magazine occasionally. The writers and often the subscribers are overwhelmingly against government participation in habitat management, particularly in land easements. I'm not sure why that is. There are often references to the Nature Conservancy in the magazine. These are predominantly negative comments.

I do think that one thing most landowners would appreciate is some kind of face to fact contact with a representative from either GFP or some other habitat organization. I know that could be difficult. There are a lot of landowners and the funds only go so far. Just a day or two ago, a rancher made the comment to me that no one from GFP or any other organization has ever approached him and asked him to keep his land in pasture. He also made the comment that it would be easy to put his land up for cash rent. I got the impression that he just wanted to talk to someone who would give him a reason to keep his land in pasture. Of course, a financial incentive always helps, but I know that isn't always possible.

Good luck with the plan.

**RESPONSE:** Thank you for your comments and suggestions regarding our strategic plan. Your suggestions were helpful and many were incorporated into this document.

We too share your concern over the conversion of native prairie to row crops across South Dakota, in particular on the Missouri Coteau. These areas are some of the most productive nesting and brood-rearing habitats in the state. Waterfowl, pheasants, prairie grouse, deer and numerous non-game species all depend on native grasslands. Something wonderful is lost when native prairie is plowed, and there is a reason people call it "breaking the land". As an agency we work constantly to fight the trends of prairie and wetland loss. It is the complex mosaic of wetlands and grasslands that make South Dakota a great place to live.

Our private lands habitat and access program strives to improve landowner relationships through shared goals. Many of our programs and practices provide for both the needs of wildlife and the landowners wishes. Please feel free to refer anyone you meet who is interested in wildlife or land management to our department. We would be happy to sit down and discuss options with them.

Again, thank you for your input and concerns over native prairie destruction. Please know this issue is high on our list of priorities as well.