

Studies show CRP supports millions of ducks and acres of grassland

WASHINGTON, May 9, 2007—U.S. Department of Agriculture Farm Service Agency (FSA) Administrator Teresa Lasseter today highlighted the results of two studies showing that the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) is creating conditions which produce and sustain millions of ducks and grassland birds in the Prairie Pothole Region (PPR) of North Dakota, South Dakota and northeastern Montana.

“This new information illustrates the profound effect CRP is having on many bird species,” said Lasseter. “The studies also support President Bush’s goal of ensuring that CRP is a targeted, focused and goal-oriented conservation program.”



Among the species of waterfowl benefiting from the CRP are the northern pintail. Photo courtesy of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

A major finding of this study is that without CRP land in the Prairie Pothole Region (PPR) of North Dakota and South Dakota, there would be approximately 1.8 million fewer sedge wrens, grasshopper sparrows, dickcissels, bobolinks and western meadowlarks, with population declines ranging from 2 percent to 52 percent, depending on the species. Grassland birds are declining more than any other bird group in North America. Numerous conservation groups have noted the rapid decline of dickcissels and grasshopper sparrows.



Photo courtesy of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Researchers divided the study of grassland birds into two parts. The first used 1995-1997 data from a well-known annual bird count, satellite imagery and computerized landcover data. Models predicted that conversion away from CRP grasslands in the PPR of the two states would impact 900,000 northern harriers, sedge wrens, grasshopper sparrows and western meadowlarks. The study area included that portion of North Dakota and South Dakota east or north of the Missouri River, approximating the PPR. This area covers approximately 86,500 square miles.

The second part of the grassland bird study

used data collected during more than 2,800 visits to study sites in 2003-2005. It calculated estimates for sedge wrens, grasshopper sparrows, dickcissels, bobolinks and western meadowlarks in the PPR in North Dakota and South Dakota. Researchers predicted that without CRP grasslands, population would decline by 1.8 million birds in the area. Species such as the sedge wren and bobolink, which used grasslands such as those found in CRP grasslands, showed the greatest proportional population declines without CRP grassland. An estimated 1.1 million bobolinks and more than 319,000 sedge wrens would be gone without CRP in the PPR.

Duck Species Study

Researchers from USFWS and USGS, Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center, conducted this study, which focused on the



Photo courtesy of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

effect of CRP on five duck species that are most common in the PPR. The study is titled "Waterfowl Response to the Conservation Reserve Program and Swampbuster Provision in the Prairie Pothole Region, 1992-2004" and is posted online at: <http://www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/webapp?area=home&subject=ecpa&topic=nra>. FSA commissioned the study by the USFWS Habitat and Population Evaluation Team, Bismarck, N.D.

A major finding of the study is that CRP grassland in the PPR in North Dakota, South Dakota and northeastern Montana helped produce 26 million ducks (2 million annually) between 1992-2004 representing five species (mallard, gadwall, blue-winged teal, shoveler and pintail). The study found this represented an estimated 30 percent increase in duck production compared to that expected from the same area without CRP cover. During the study period, researchers found that of the average 5 million breeding pairs of five duck species that settled in the PPR, on average about 1.6 million hens used CRP cover for nesting. Researchers estimated that wetlands in CRP fields attracted breeding ducks, which resulted in an average annual increase of more than 334,000 additional breeding ducks settling in the Dakotas PPR during 1992-2004.

In conducting the study, researchers analyzed breeding duck and wetland data from 1992-2004 in relation to CRP in the PPR in North Dakota, South Dakota and northeastern



Photo courtesy of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Montana. The study combined computer and satellite imagery with field surveys that included visits to more than 2,300 wetland basins twice each year. The highest density of breeding ducks was found on small temporary and seasonal wetlands, and particularly those wetlands in CRP fields.

FSA implements CRP on behalf of USDA's Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC). CRP is the nation's largest private-lands conservation program with more than 36 million acres enrolled. Through CRP, farmers and ranchers enroll eligible land in 10 to 15 year contracts. Participants plant appropriate cover such as grasses and trees in crop fields and along streams. The plantings help prevent soil and nutrients from running into regional waterways and affecting water quality. The long-term vegetative cover also improves wildlife habitat and soil quality.

For more information about FSA's conservation programs, visit your local USDA Service Center or online at <http://www.fsa.usda.gov>; click on Conservation Programs.



Photo courtesy of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Grassland Bird Study

Researchers from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center, and the University of Montana conducted the study that analyzes the effect CRP has on grassland birds in the PPR. The study is titled "Benefits of the Conservation Reserve Program to Grassland Bird Populations in the Prairie Pothole Region of North Dakota and South Dakota." It is posted online at: <http://www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/webapp?area=home&subject=ecpa&topic=nra>. USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) commissioned the study by USFWS Habitat and Population Evaluation Team, Bismarck, N.D.



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