

CONSERVATION *Showcase*



Farmer Adds Land for Wildlife, Flood Protection

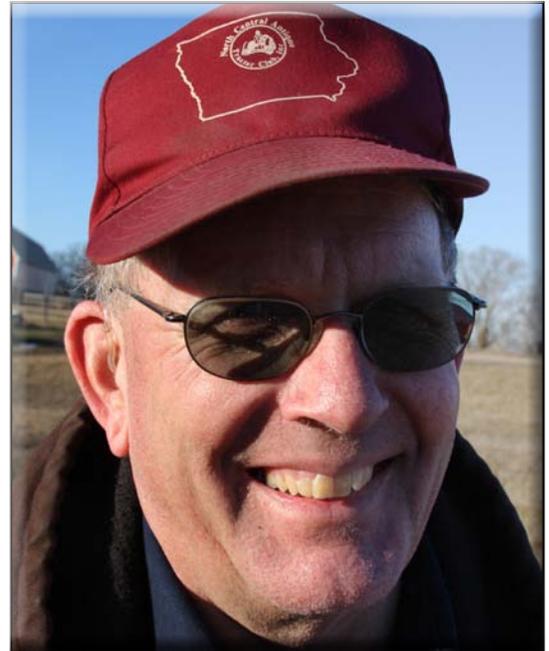
Butler County farmer Max Folkerts is bucking a trend. Instead of pulling acres out of the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), he says he is happy to reduce downstream flooding and improve habitat by adding 140 acres of his land to a new CRP practice called State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE).

He simply wants spring to arrive so he can start planting native grasses and forbs on his newly contracted land. "I'm anxious to get started. I want to plant the native grasses in that bottomland and take frequently flooding farmland out of the current corn/soybean rotation and turn it into wildlife habitat," Folkerts said.

The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) recently approved SAFE to create habitat beneficial to targeted, high-priority wildlife species. It is administered by the Farm Service Agency (FSA) with assistance from USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). SAFE helps restore or improve wildlife habitat.

Iowa FSA figures show Butler County is a leader in the SAFE program. Lawrence Green, NRCS District Conservationist in Allison, says Butler County completed 38 SAFE contracts for 778 acres in 2008. He says there are another 21 contracts for 393 acres waiting funding.

"I like this program," said Green. "SAFE gives us another option to help farmers address resource concerns on their land. It offers landowners an annual rental payment and it can provide 50 percent financial assistance toward the cost of seed, seedbed preparation, and planting, plus an incentive



Max Folkerts

payment of 40 percent of the total eligible cost of practice installation. It's good for the environment and great for wildlife."

Like Folkerts, Green looks forward to the project's completion. "Daily Creek flows through the Folkerts' farm. Converting this farm field back into native grasses and forbs will help control a lot of erosion. It will improve water quality for those downstream and add habitat," said Green.

The Folkerts' farm is located north of Parkersburg next to a 4,445-acre DNR wildlife management area called the Big Marsh. The Big Marsh is home to many species of birds and animals.

Max and his wife, Marianne, say they enjoy seeing their furry and feathered visitors.

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“We see a lot of deer and a wide variety of birds including Canada geese, orioles, turkeys, turkey vultures, hummingbirds and owls,” he said. “In the spring, the sky will be so black with ducks it looks like there is a cloud of smoke blocking the sun. We raise food plots for the animals and put out bird feed during the winter. Seeing wildlife simply gives us joy.”



The Folkerts purchased their 340-acre farm in 1988. They said their original goal was to turn it into a home for wildlife and an “Eden” for them. “We started working with NRCS and FSA soon after we purchased the farm. We’ve been involved with CRP for 20 years. It’s been a long process, but we are getting very close to being

Farmer Max Folkerts greets NRCS Soil Conservationist Nicky Williams while District Conservationist Lawrence Green looks on. This spring, the 140-acre field in the background will be planted into native grasses and forbs under a State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) contract. The frequently flooding bottomland will be retired from farming and returned to native prairie to enhance wildlife habitat.

done. With this new SAFE seeding, our farm will be as close to an Eden as we can make it,” said Folkerts. “We are grateful for the help.”

*Dick Tremain, Public Affairs Specialist
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