

Wetlands Bring Back Dream of Abundant Wildlife

By: Jennifer Salak, NRCS Earth Team Volunteer

A fourth-generation farmer near Dakota City, Neb., dreams of restoring wildlife back to the way it was when he was a boy. Jim Bliven will be able to make his dream a reality with the help of the Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS) Wetlands Reserve Enhancement Program (WREP).

The WREP is a voluntary conservation program that provides landowners technical and financial assistance to protect, restore, and enhance wetlands on their property. Bliven first learned about the program by attending a WREP informational meeting and reading brochures from the Dakota City NRCS office.

He soon realized the important role wetlands play in improving water quality, providing habitat for wildlife, and reducing soil erosion and flooding. Bliven began asking NRCS Resource Conservationist Neil Stockfleth, about the program. "Neil had a lot of great ideas and was instrumental in helping me get started in the program," Bliven said.

Bliven decided to enroll about 57 acres of wet, unproductive farmland into the program. Included on this parcel of land are three shallow water areas (for a total of eight acres), which Bliven excavated himself, and three, one-acre food plots for wildlife. The soil excavated to create these open water areas has been placed in broad piles in order to build micro-topography. According to Stockfleth, this micro-topography "creates high and low elevations, which stimulates diversity of plants and animal habitats."

Native grasses, such as Big Bluestem, Little Bluestem, Western Wheatgrass, Indian Grass, Switchgrass, Virginia Wildrye, Canada Wildrye, and Sideoats Grama, and a variety of native forbs will be planted on the rest of the land. In addition to doing all the excavating, Bliven will do all the planting. It's been hard work but he doesn't mind because he knows the payoff will be worth it.



Jennifer Salak, NRCS

Dakota City farmer Jim Bliven (left) says NRCS Resource Conservationist Neil Stockfleth (right) helped him get started in the Wetlands Reserve Enhancement Program.



Janet Thomas, NRCS

Jim turns his nearly finished irrigation well on for the first time last fall to pump water into his newly excavated wetland areas.



It's so satisfying to walk out here and see all of this wildlife. If you build it, they will come.

**- Jim Bliven,
Landowner**



Adjacent to the WREP land Bliven installed an irrigation well last fall at his own expense to add water to the wetlands at specific times of the year. He wants to make sure that waterfowl, like Canada geese, ducks, and upland game, like pheasants and quail, always have a place to rest and nest. He also hopes deer and turkeys will visit the wetlands.

In addition to attracting wildlife, Bliven plans on doing some limited hunting on his WREP land once it is fully established. He says it will be a great place to train hunting dogs, especially pups.

After being enrolled in WREP for two years now, Jim wholeheartedly believes it is a great program and “wishes more people would take advantage of it.”

As he walks around his WREP land, he can already see the fruits of his labor. Shore birds feed along the water's edge and flocks of ducks take off and land repeatedly in the rippling water. He also sees what look like heron and raccoon tracks in the mud surrounding the water. “It's so satisfying to walk out here and see all of this wildlife,” says Jim. “If you build it, they will come.” ♦



Jennifer Salak, NRCS

Ducks can be seen flying high above the shallow water areas on Jim Bliven's WREP land.

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