

CONSERVATION *Showcase*

Investment in habitat yields bounty of wildlife, recreation and enjoyment for Washington farm family

A few years ago, while at his farm home near Anatone, Ron Scheibe answered a knock at his door. Standing before him was a bird hunter from Pennsylvania who asked for and then received permission from Mr. Scheibe to hunt on his land.

A few weeks later, Mr. Scheibe received a letter from the hunter's attorney. With some trepidation, he opened the envelope and began reading the letter. It contained a blunt, but generous offer to purchase the farm – all 7,000-plus acres of it.

"I guess he enjoyed his hunting experience and the land, and wanted to buy me out," Mr. Scheibe says.

Despite the fact that Mr. Scheibe has shown no interest in selling the farm, the letters keep coming.

"Every year I get another one from the same guy," Mr. Scheibe says. "The last one all but said 'name your price.'" Still, Mr. Scheibe says he is not interested.

It's valuable land. Made so in large part, Mr. Scheibe says, by an investment he and his family made in wildlife habitat development.



The Scheibe farm has grown in both market value and in intrinsic value for the entire family (from left) Art, Nathan, Ron and Kim.

And that investment has been substantial.

With a little help from NRCS...

Through USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS) Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP), Mr.

Scheibe and his wife Kim, have installed some 30,000 feet of fence; created nearly 16 acres of conservation cover; planted 15 acres of trees and shrubs; created 61 acres of livestock exclusion; and seeded 10 acres of rangeland with native grasses.

“Those activities don’t include what they’ve done through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) or through the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) NRCS’ Jim Schroeder says. Schroeder, who has worked with the couple during the past several years, says to enumerate all of their wildlife enhancements would “take a little while.”

Some of the additional wildlife habitat practice highlights, include the construction of 30 ponds, alternate watering facilities, cross fencing, and pest management activities.

It all started, Mr Scheibe says because he wanted pheasants on his land. “I had water, but it was clear that I needed more trees and shrubs to make better habitat conditions,” he says. Just after a couple of years, Mr. Scheibe has noticed an increase in the pheasant population. “There are already more pheasants,” he says, “but there’s also a noticeable increase in the diversity of all types of wildlife – not just game species.

Bringing value to the farm

“Just in one little shelter belt,” Mr. Scheibe says, “there’s now a wide variety of song birds and other birds. It’s really remarkable what a little habitat can produce,” he says.

And while some agricultural producers see grass strips, shelter belts, and other wildlife management practices as impediments to their operation, Mr. Scheibe says the minor inconveniences those practices pose are dramatically outweighed by the value wildlife brings to the farm.

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Ron Scheibe
Scheibe farm



A mule deer doe finds a cool drink of water in one of the 30 ponds created on the Scheibe farm in Asotin County.

“Sure, these practices take some land out of production – and yes, you do have to move equipment around them. Both of those comments are valid points,” Mr. Scheibe says. “But there’s a surplus of grain on the market and if you’re going to farm you’re going to have to look to make money in other ways. Subsidy money is disappearing and there’s only so much wheat you can produce, and we don’t have much say in what you get for it,” he

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says. “It makes sense to look for ways to diversify.”

Wildlife, he says, helps diversify the operation by bringing recreational value to the farm – while also improving the aesthetics. “Plus,” he says, “there’s real value to me in just seeing 20-30 elk in my fields.”

Wild about wildlife

“Mr. Scheibe is a remarkable conservation farmer,” NRCS’ Schroeder says. “From his no-till farming techniques to his robust commitment to improving wildlife habitat, I’ve never met anyone who is so wild about wildlife,” he says.

But Mr. Scheibe is quick to credit USDA’s conservation programs for providing the financial assistance to accelerate and



From their back porch, the Scheibe family has a picture-postcard view of the surrounding mountains. They’re also able to view a wide variety of game and non-game species, thanks in large measure to the Scheibe’s commitment to wildlife habitat development.



Above, a row of trees will soon grow to provide important cover for wildlife on the Scheibe farm.

leverage that work. “Thanks to these conservation programs, we were able to do more in five years, than we could have afforded to do in our lifetime,” he says. “I’ve seen the impact these wildlife practices have had on our land. Those conservation programs have made a dream come true,” Mr. Scheibe says.

*Written by Ron Nichols, NRCS
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