

# Ducks Unlimited

*Working Lands  
Ag Program*



Mae Rose Petrehn  
Grazing Biologist II

LEADER *in* WETLANDS  
CONSERVATION

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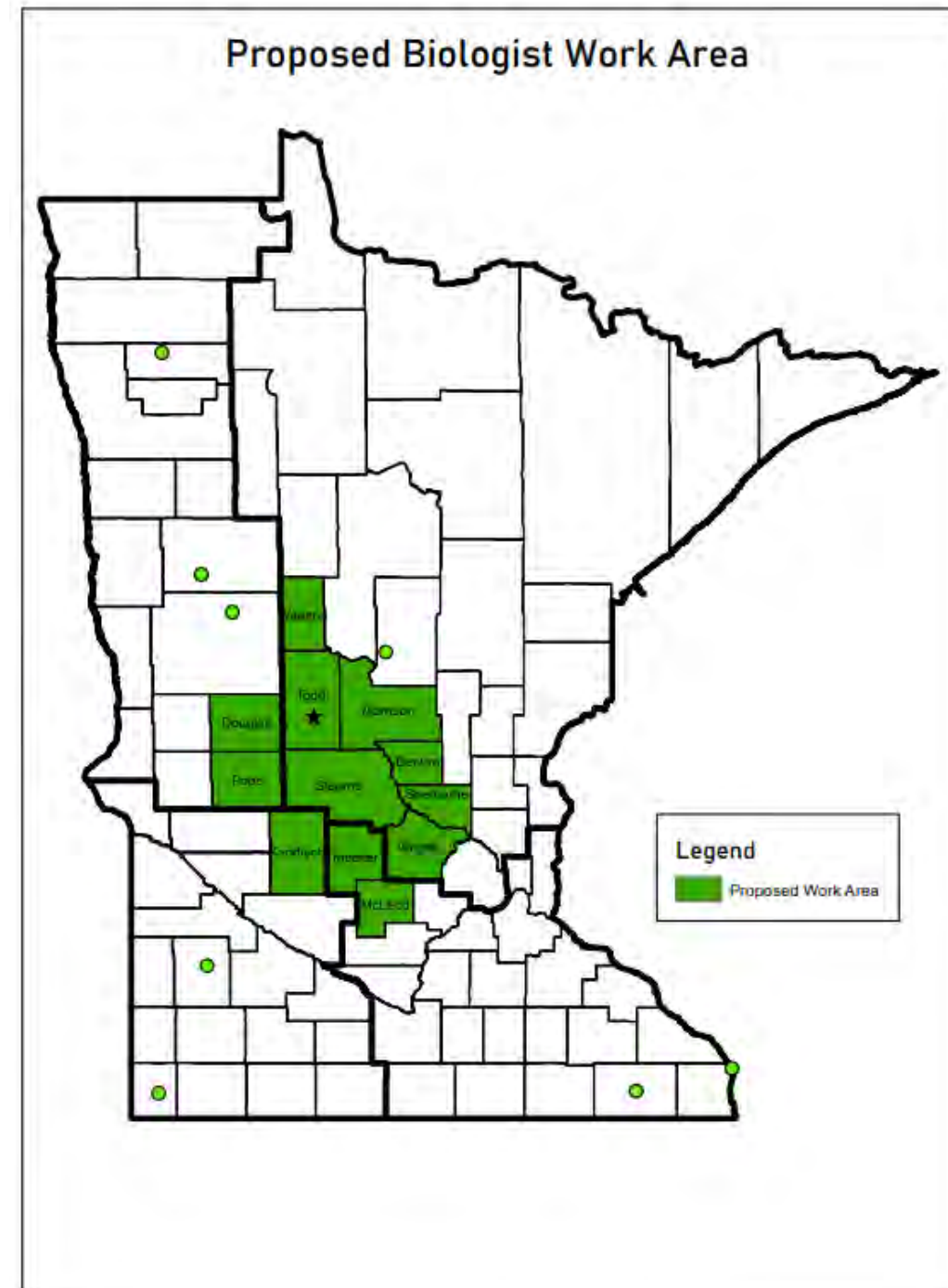
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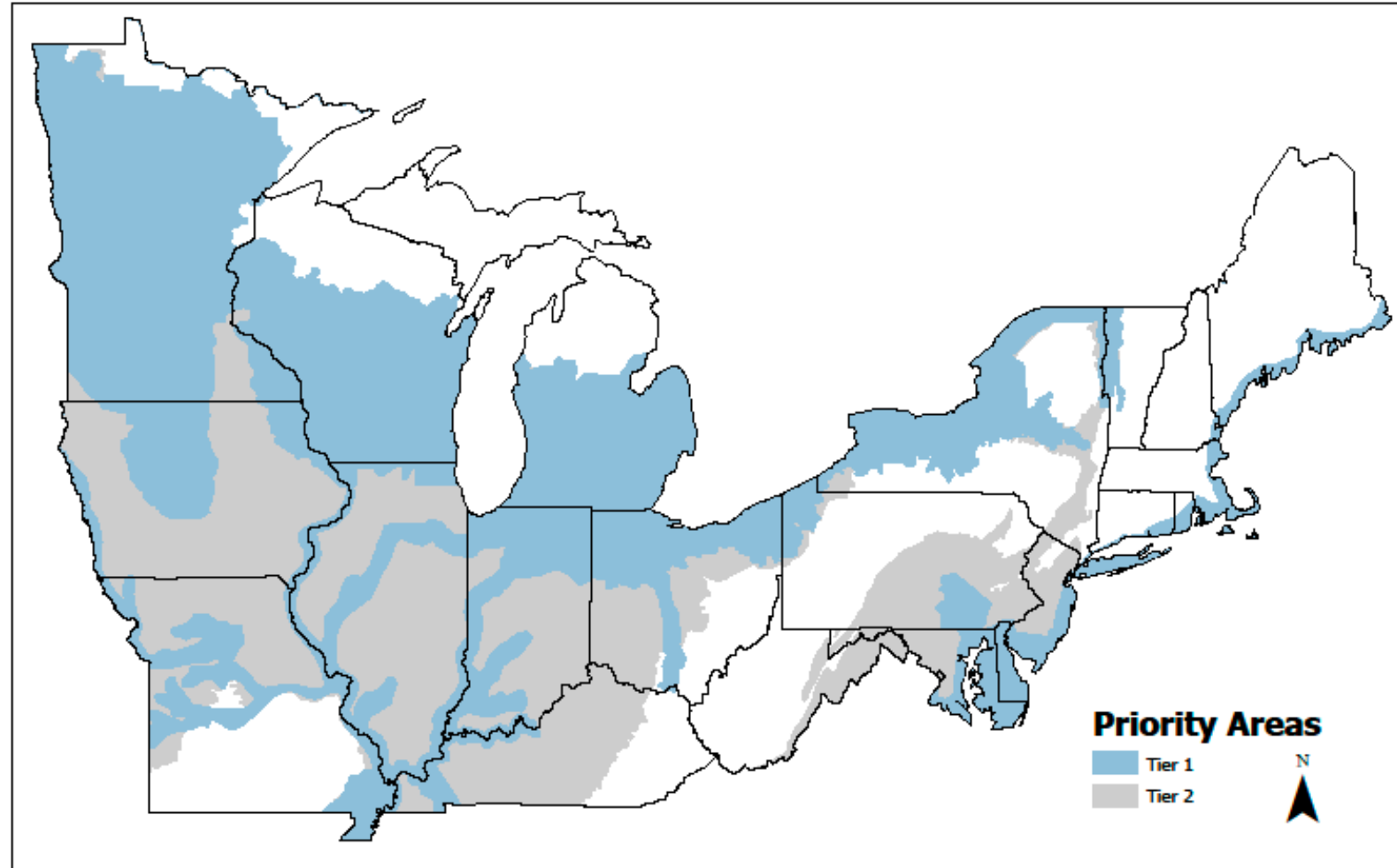
# Grazing Biologist Objectives

- Develop grazing management plans
- Provide technical assistance to livestock producers looking to improve pasture and grasslands
- Improve soil health, water quality, forage production and wildlife habitat
- Utilizing NRCS programs, watershed/ SWCD Partnerships and nontraditional grant funding.
- Work with other state, federal and NGOs to develop grazing plans on public and private easement land
- Keeping dollars in local communities= keeping local farms viable



# GLAR Ag Focus Areas

Great Lakes / Atlantic Region (GLAR)  
Working Lands Ag Program - Priority Areas



0 90 180 360 Miles

# DU and Working Lands

## Living Lakes Initiative

- Current Partnerships
  - NRCS, USFWS, NFWF, State Fish and Wildlife Agencies, Departments of Agriculture, Commodity Partners
- Resource Concerns
- Sedimentation, water quality and degraded wildlife habitat:
  - Degradation of grasslands and pothole wetlands
  - Conversion of grasslands and pothole wetlands to ag crop production

## Conservation Strategies

- Conservation grazing and planning (rotational grazing, livestock integration)
- Soil health (cover crops, no-till)
- Improved water quality and nutrient management (buffers, filter strips)
- Wetland restoration and creation (tile drainage wetlands, seasonally flooded cropland)
- Land protection (conservation easements)
  
- **2022 started in Minnesota**
- **Ag Team beginnings**
  - **From 4 to 25 employees and growing!**

# Prairie Pothole Region (IA, MN)

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## Primary Resource Concerns

- Conversion of grasslands and pothole wetlands to ag crop production, water quality

## Desirable Conservation Practices

- Rotational grazing (livestock integration), cover crops, edge of field grass and wetland buffers, WRE, CRP, CREP, and land protection

## Program Focus (*Soil Health, Grazing, Water Quality, Land Protection*) and Strategies

- Advance short and long-term ag friendly conservation practices on working lands
- When and where possible, look to advance conservation grazing that prohibits tree and invasive plant species
- Continue providing economically competitive working lands easement opportunities for landowners – partner funding sources include NRCS/Farm Bill, Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM), Outdoor Heritage Fund (OHF), and USFWS
- Continue building on partnership with IDALS in Iowa that improves water quality and edge-of-field wetlands
- DU staff in the GPR are delivering a strong soil health program in the Dakotas and Montana, continued cross-region collaboration with them will be important to GLAR staff as we develop a similar soil health and grazing program for the pothole region of Minnesota and Iowa



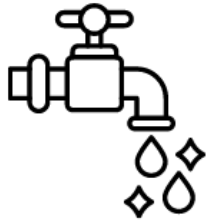
# About Me

- BS Rural Sociology, Northland College
- MS Sustainable Agriculture, Iowa State University
  - Grazing Management for Habitat
- Holistic Management Certified Educator
- Commercial Ranching in 3 states
  - “Mob Grazing”
- Chippewa 10% Project
- Feedlot Inspection & Permitting
  - Large EQIP Projects
- Organic Inspection in 7 states for 4 years
- Seed Industry in SD, small grain agronomy
- Sheep operation near Sunburg, MN on native prairie



# Why does DU have a Grazing Specialist?

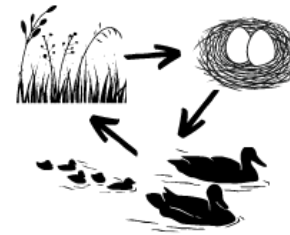
**DU Mission:** Ducks Unlimited conserves, restores, and manages wetlands and associated habitats for North America's waterfowl. These habitats also benefit other wildlife and people.



CLEAN WATER



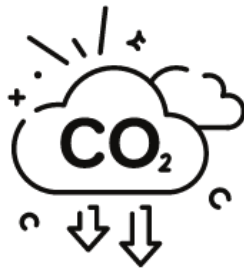
HEALTHIER SOIL



WILDLIFE HABITAT



RESTORED LANDSCAPES



CLIMATE CHANGE  
MITIGATION



FLOOD AND DROUGHT  
RESISTANCE



PRODUCER PROFITABILITY  
AND RESILIENCE

**We can't accomplish this without you!**



# MINNESOTA LANDSCAPE HISTORY AND CHALLENGES

- The Prairie pothole Region (PPR), historically covered in native grassland/prairie and dense depressional wetlands.
- Landscape has been heavily degraded or converted to another land use
- Less than 1% of native prairies left in Minnesota
- 90% loss of wetlands in Minnesota



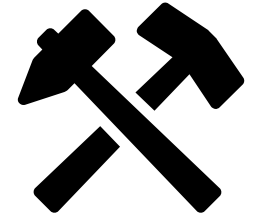
76.5% Private Land



**MINNESOTA**



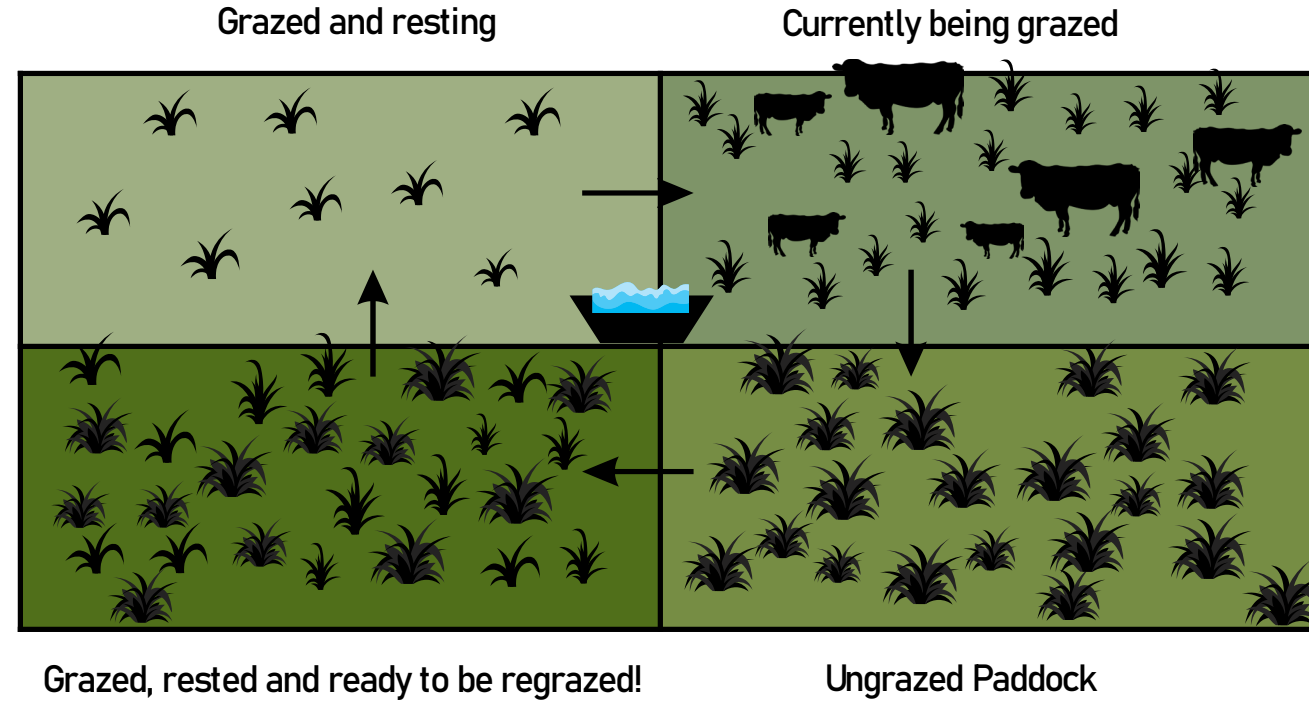
Grassland/pasture





# Rotational Grazing

- Rotation = Rest = Regrowth
- Increased forage production
- Improved water infiltration
- Reduced soil erosion
- Diverse wildlife habitat
- Minimized feedlot issues/ labor efficiency
- Reduce species shift
- Improved bottom line

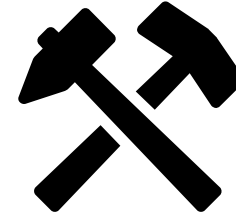


**Forage production increases as management increases**



# Practices

- Prescribed Grazing
- Pasture and Hayland Planting
- Access Control/  
Streamcrossing
- Forage Harvest  
Management
- Livestock Pipeline
- Silvopasture
- Annual Forages
- Cover Crops

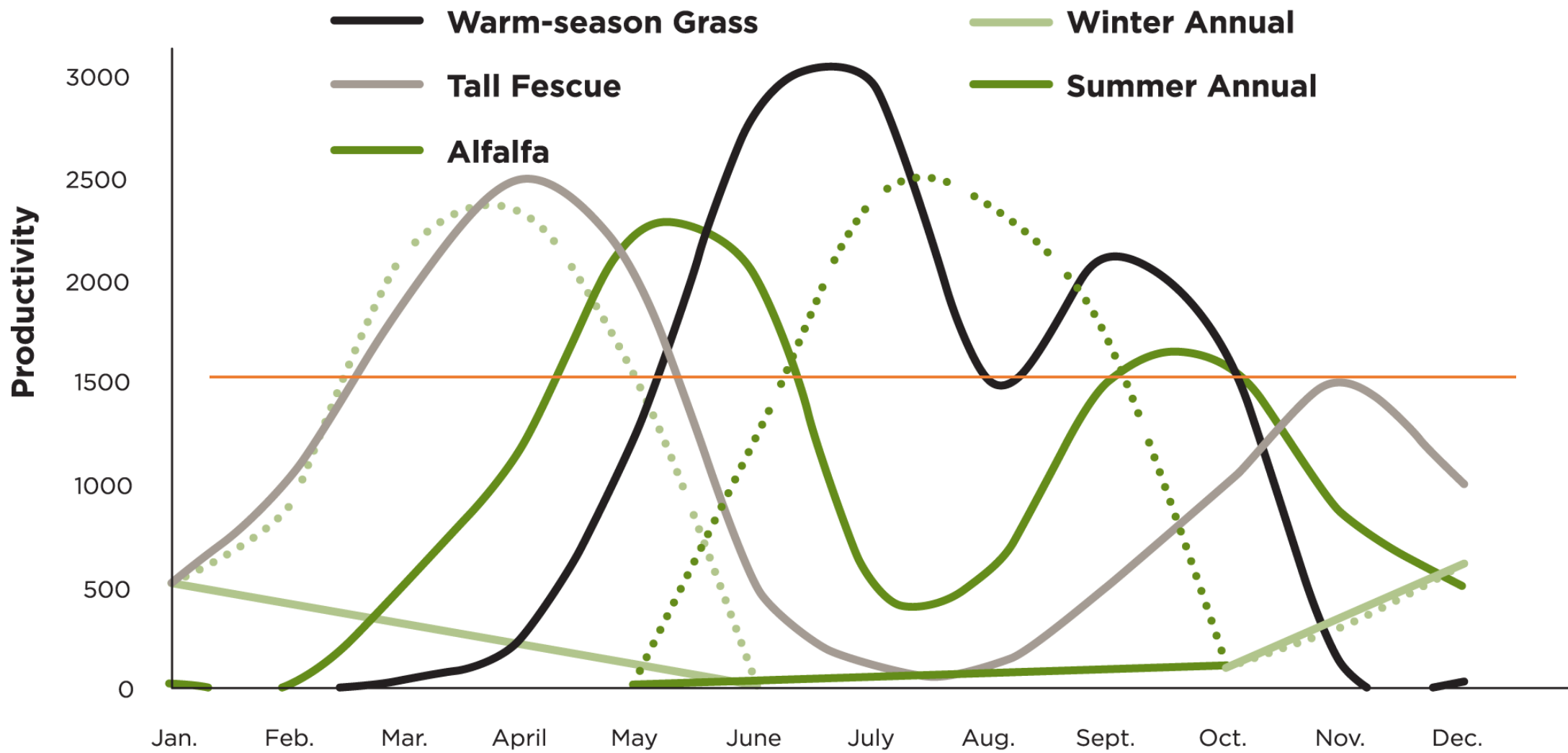




# Forage Quality and Diversity

- Incorporating legumes
- Native incorporation
- Drought and pest resiliency
- Avoiding “summer slump”
- Extend the grazing season
- Reduce supplemental feeding
- Different nutrients
- Improved wildlife habitat







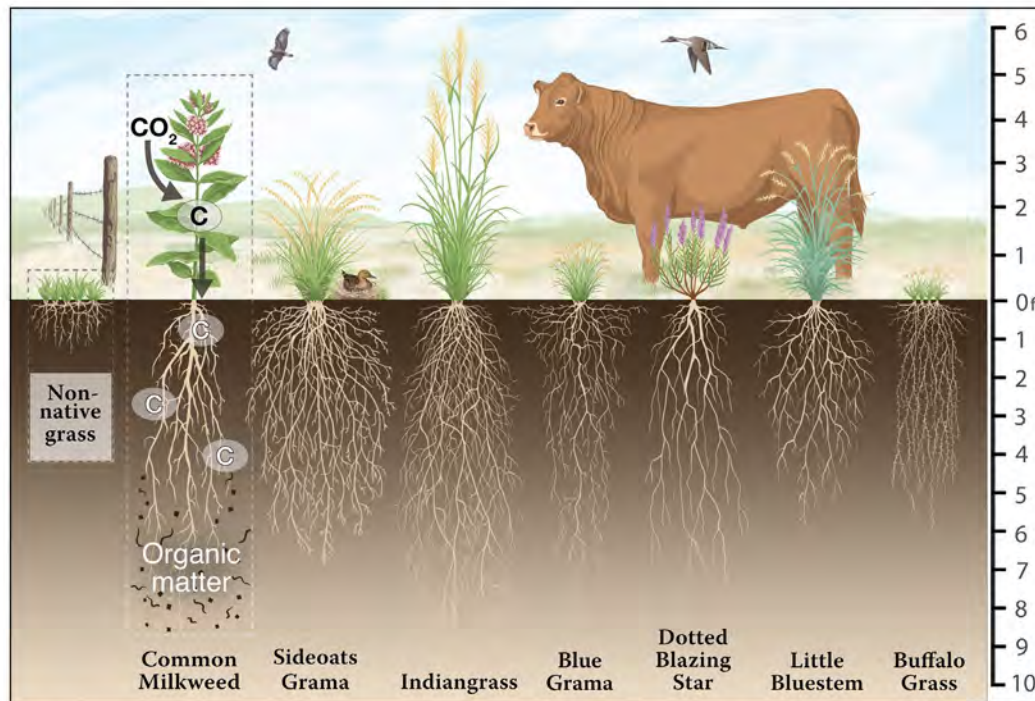
# Grazing Cover Crops and Crop Stubble

- Organic Matter builder
- Grazing season extender
- High quality forage
- Diversifying rotation= soil health
- Reduced tillage
- Increasing OM by 1% will store  $\frac{3}{4}$ " of rain -> Less water runoff
- Case studies show grazing covers can cost **half** of what a feedlot system can.

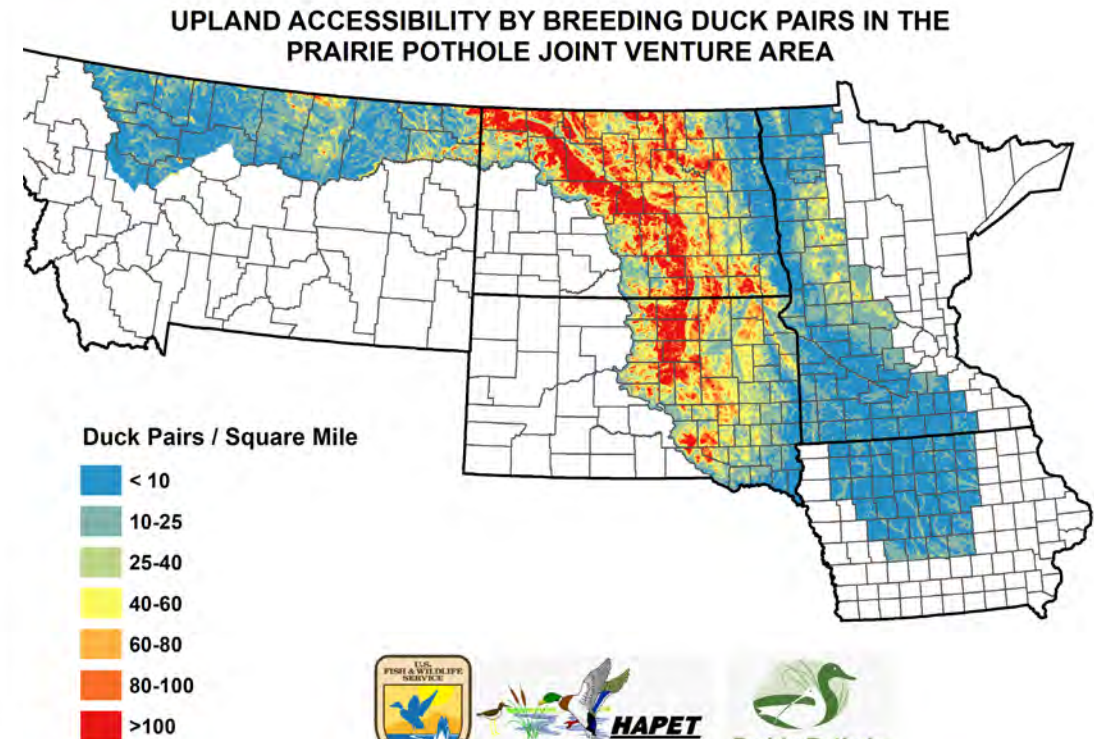


# Habitat Function

- Taller, diverse grass -> nesting habitat, pollinator habitat
- Increased soil biology
- Provides NEEDED disturbance



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# 2023 Total Impacted Acres – 9,962

2023 Acre Breakdown	EQIP	CTA	MNDNR	Grassland CRP	TNC
Plans in Draft*	13	0	5	0	2
Draft acres*	1,752.4	0	6,088.7	0	1,975.4
Plans Completed**	1	1	0	1	0
Acres in contract	12.4	71.2	0	61.9	0

An aerial photograph of a farm event. In the foreground, a long line of green tractors is parked on a dirt road. To the right, a large blue tent is set up, with several smaller white tents nearby. A large white building is visible in the background. The scene is outdoors on a sunny day.

## 2024 Pending Projects:

- **Native Forages: Growing Drought and Climate Resiliency-**
  - *Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources*
- **Soil Health and Organic Transition- Farm Innovation Expo in Cokato MN**
  - *Aug 15 2024- USDA Transition to Organic Partnership Program*
- **GrazeHers Field School, *Blackduck MN June 4-5***
  - *Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative*



# Looking Forward!



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