

Eau Claire County Success from the Field

Restoring Wetlands for Wildlife

Background

William Connelly is a private landowner in eastern Eau Claire County, near the town of Augusta. Much of William's land is dedicated to wildlife and includes fields, pollinator habitat, managed forests and wetlands. The property also includes a 10-acre field enrolled in the Farm Service Agency's Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) in previous years. Overall, William owns 311 acres and is most interested in restoring and managing his land for wildlife habitat and water quality. Connelly bought the land in the 1970s, and he would like to ensure that it's taken care of and in good shape for the future.

Program Successes

William began his partnership with NRCS around 1987, when he first enrolled some of his land in the CRP. His goal was to provide restored habitat for many species of local wildlife, like insects, birds and deer. In the following years, he utilized other NRCS programs, such as the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) to help seed farm roads on the land, plant pollinator habitat and install wildlife-friendly fencing.

William also enrolled in the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) to restore a wetland. William's wetland restoration included 1.5 acres of wetland scrape, spoil-spreading and critical area planting, which he says he is very pleased with today. "Oh yeah, I would consider this a success. It was obvious there was a wetland here but it was very degraded. Since the scrape, we've seen more birds and insects and there are even fish in these ponds now," says Connelly. Soil Conservation Technician David Lato helped with much of the planning and construction for this wetland restoration. "Putting in something that restores degraded wetlands is always enjoyable. These scrapes are working towards restoring natural wetland habitat and the landowner is happy that he is helping the environment and has a great place to watch birds and other wildlife," explained David.

What was once a field of reed canary grass is now two separate ponds, and they do indeed seem to be flourishing with wildlife. Watch the surface of the ponds for a few minutes and you will be sure to see many different species of aquatic insects and birds utilizing this new habitat.



Above: William and Dave survey and discuss the potential wetland scrape. **Below:** William and his wife, Peggy, are enjoying the restored wetland and the wildlife that have moved in.



Future Plans

Much of William's land enrolled in CRP has expired, and he says he would like to renew the CRP acreage and add more acres to it if possible. The land enrolled in CSP for pollinator habitat, wildlife fencing and non-industrial private forestland is set to expire in 2019, but William says he will continue to manage this land, and re-enroll if he can. As far as his wetland restoration goes, or future projects that come to mind, William would like to continue his partnership with the NRCS by utilizing programs like EQIP and CSP in the future. Connelly says he has not ruled out doing another wetland scrape if the opportunity arises, "The results of the scrapes speak for themselves; I would be very interested in adding to this restored wetland."

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