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## Conservation Notes

*Current topics and issues affecting hunting, fishing, and outdoor recreation in our North Dakota.*

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### Hard Winter-Inadequate Habitat

North Dakota winters can be hard on everything; people, livestock, wildlife, and infrastructure. The bright side was the 2023 spring wetland levels. “This is the seventh wettest spring in terms of wet basins on record, following our second wettest survey last year,” Mike Szymanski, NDGF, said. “The prairie wetland ecosystem is highly dynamic, which is evidenced by the last few years bouncing between wet and dry conditions. Whether wet or not, waterfowl resources continue to decline in the state due to diminished reproductive potential, limited by secure nesting cover.”

To effectively manage our wildlife; deer, pheasants, sharp-tailed grouse, and waterfowl; we need to provide abundant, high-quality habitat. But ND continues to lose more habitat every year. Not enough is being done to provide the habitats needed to provide nesting and fawning cover, food, winter shelter and speed population recovery. According to Szymanski “Breeding duck indices above 4 million in the state will be unlikely, even during the wettest years, unless our upland nesting habitats improve”. “The Dakotas will no longer be able to consistently buoy midcontinent duck populations without large numbers of acres of secure nesting cover on the landscape in the form of perennial grasses provided by programs like CRP”. North Dakota Wildlife Federation and other wildlife organizations proposed a million-acre habitat plan several years ago (CN#48). If elected officials ignore the needs of wildlife, then opportunities for hunters and wildlife enthusiasts will continue to decline. Foregone opportunities will decrease outdoor recreation opportunities and depress local economies that depend on spending by resident and non-resident hunters, especially on small-town main streets.

Therefore, ND legislators should advocate an increased cap in the Federal CRP acreages in the 2023 Farm Bill. In addition, a State CRP-type program using the State’s Outdoor Heritage Fund or Legacy Fund.

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For more information on this or other conservation topics, contact: John Bradley, Executive Director, North Dakota Wildlife Federation, ([jbradley.ndwf@gmail.com](mailto:jbradley.ndwf@gmail.com)), Mike McEnroe, Past President, North Dakota Wildlife Federation([memcenroe@midco.net](mailto:memcenroe@midco.net)) or Rick Nelson, Past President, North Dakota Chapter, The Wildlife Society, ([bluebill@bis.midco.net](mailto:bluebill@bis.midco.net)). For a complete list of Conservation Notes visit ([ndctws.org](http://ndctws.org))-Library.