

CRP Land – Alternative Uses of Restored Wetlands Fact Sheet

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service - North Dakota

March 2008

Considerations to Retain Wetland Restorations

Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) participants who restored wetlands across the prairie pothole region of North Dakota have made a significant contribution to improve wildlife habitat. As CRP contracts expire, landowner(s) will need to decide whether to maintain those restored wetlands or convert them to conditions existing prior to CRP. Before reaching this decision, landowners should consider the following:

CRP Retention: Restored wetlands and associated buffers and uplands can be re-enrolled in the continuous CRP. Various wetland practices are available depending on location in North Dakota. CP23, CP23A, CP27 and CP28, CP37, and newly announced CP38 can be used to re-enroll restored wetland acres and associated uplands. In many cases, the current CRP cover will be accepted without any modifications. Contact the local FSA or NRCS to determine the CRP practice applicable to your situation.



Mitigation: After a CRP contract expires, landowners with an interest in a long-term agreement can be compensated to use restored wetlands as mitigation. Ditch plugs do not need to be removed and then re-installed for a wetland to be used for mitigation credits. Wetland mitigation is needed throughout North Dakota for a variety of purposes. Potential buyers of mitigation credits include USDA participants who want to drain wetlands to improve production; the North Dakota Department of Transportation to mitigate wetland impacts associated with road construction projects and airport managers trying to meet Federal Aviation Administration requirements for wetland removal adjacent to airport runways.

Mitigation credits, that a CRP field can yield, will vary depending the acreage of wetlands restored and the extent of drainage in place prior to restoration. Wetlands totally drained or filled prior to December 23, 1985, and that are considered a prior converted (PC) wetland will garner the most credit. Partially drained or filled wetlands (FW) prior to December 23, 1985, existing wetlands (W), and a 50-foot upland buffer around the perimeter can also yield mitigation credit but usually at a reduced rate.

Some wetlands have received a large amount of sediment from adjoining uplands due to previous land use practices prior to being enrolled in CRP. Sediment adversely effects wetland habitat and reduces wetland functions including water storage and ground water recharge. Wetland mitigation credits will be based on the amount of sediment that can be removed from the wetland. Removal of sediment usually diminishes cattails, thus improving wetland functions and wildlife habitat.

If you have restored wetlands on your expiring or expired CRP contract acres and you are interested in selling mitigation credits, contact your local NRCS office prior to making the decision to remove ditch plugs. The price of wetland mitigation credits varies depending on current land prices, the tract of land and other factors. Recently, wetland mitigation credits have been selling for \$3,000 to \$4,000 per acre.

Wildlife habitat: Wetlands and associated grasslands provide excellent habitat for migratory waterfowl and shore birds. They also provide excellent habitat for resident wildlife species, especially during the winter. Ring-necked pheasants and white-tailed deer use cattails and other wetland vegetation to survive harsh winters. These heavily vegetated wetlands frequently provide better winter habitat than minimally designed multi-row tree and shrub plantings.



Management of restored wetlands for wildlife habitat depends on the species of wildlife that interest you. While cattail wetlands provide excellent winter habitat for ring-necked pheasants, white-tailed deer and furbearers, their value as waterfowl and shorebird habitat is limited due to lack of open water and exposed shoreline. Cattail wetlands also provide blackbird roosting habitat, which can negatively impact sunflower production depending on the size and location of the wetland.

Management decisions can be made according to species goals. Reducing cattails through grazing, burning, mowing, sediment removal or

spraying with glyphosate (labeled for over water application) will reduce cattail and provide waterfowl and shorebird habitat while reducing blackbird roosting sites. However, these management practices could greatly reduce white-tailed deer and ring-necked pheasant winter cover. Restored wetlands have contributed to the recovery of waterfowl populations since the 1980s.

Forage production: If the expired CRP contract will remain in perennial vegetation, restored wetlands can increase forage available for grazing or hay production. Depending on vegetation type, wetlands can produce over two tons of forage per acre. Restored wetlands can provide livestock forage throughout the growing season when used as part of a grazing system. Depending on the size and depth of the restored wetland, the basin can also provide livestock water, especially early in the grazing season. Livestock grazing can have beneficial impacts on cattail choked wetlands. Cattle will graze cattails allowing for other wetland species to grow in the wetland. Reducing cattails will provide more open water area for waterfowl and the potential to create greater species diversity in the wetland.



Photo courtesy of Central Grassland Research Extension Center

Flood Water Retention and Water Quality Improvement: Restored wetlands within a watershed play an important role in the reduction of downstream flooding, pollution abatement, and ground water recharge. Water stored in wetlands and the time lag created for water to filter through wetlands reduces flood peaks, improves water quality by reducing nutrients and sediment load and replenishes aquifers by increasing ground water recharge.

For additional information, contact your local USDA-NRCS office.

All programs and services are offered on a nondiscriminatory basis.