



Upper Missouri Coteau Focus Area

Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program in Montana

Introduction and General Description

The Upper Missouri Coteau Focus Area is located in the extreme northeastern corner of the State. Its boundaries are formed by the Canadian border, the State line between North Dakota and Montana, the Fort Peck Indian Reservation, and Missouri River. The Focus Area includes Sheridan, Roosevelt, and Daniels counties.

This tri-county area was entirely glaciated and is a continuation of the Prairie Pothole Region of the Dakotas. The northern portions of the Focus Area have terrain common to the glacial Missouri Coteau, a very hilly landscape dotted with numerous shallow wetlands.

Native vegetation is of the mixed-grass prairie type. The area lies in the transition zone between the tallgrass prairie to the east and the shortgrass prairie of central Montana. Cool season grasses predominate with scattered shrub communities. Intact wetland-grassland complexes are intermixed with intensively farmed areas throughout northeastern Montana. Many of the intact wetland-grassland tracts are privately owned.

The climate is typical of the northern Great Plains, with warm summers, cold winters, and marked variation in seasonal precipitation, which averages 12 to 15 inches per year. Temperatures can exceed 100 degrees

Fahrenheit in the summer and drop to minus 45 degrees Fahrenheit in winter.

The Focus Area includes Medicine Lake National Wildlife Refuge with a total of 31,660 acres of open water, marsh and upland acres and 43 Waterfowl Production Areas (WPAs) totaling 11,772 acres. The WPAs vary in size from 4 acres to 2,012 acres. An additional 18,592 acres of privately owned wetlands and uplands are protected with perpetual conservation easements.

Species of Special Concern

Habitat diversity plays a key role in supporting the Upper Missouri Coteau's wildlife diversity. The combination of wetlands, native and tame grasslands, and agricultural fields provides habitats



Piping plover with chick.

for various resident and migratory birds as well numerous species of mammals, reptiles, and amphibians.

There are several Species of Special Concern found in the Focus Area. These include: burrowing owl, Baird's sparrow, Sprague's pipit, Forster's tern, black tern, lark bunting, grasshopper sparrow, Franklin's gull, marbled godwit, ferruginous hawk, horned grebe, and common tern. The piping plover is listed as threatened species and 85 percent of Montana's total breeding



Aerial view of the Upper Missouri Coteau.

population is found in the Upper Missouri Coteau Focus Area.

Threats

Threats within the Upper Missouri Coteau Focus Area are generally related to agriculture. Wetland drainage, prairie conversion, encroachment of non-native grass species into native prairie, invasive species, erosion, wetland sedimentation, and degraded water quality from nutrients and pesticides are all problems. Any slowdown in the livestock industry will force landowners to convert more native grassland to cropland.

Oil and gas development is another concern. Spills, leaks, saltwater contamination, and habitat loss from pipelines and roads are adversely impacting wetlands and uplands.

Conservation Strategies

Habitat work will continue to emphasize wetland creation and restoration work and grazing systems.

Portions of the Focus Area have abundant nesting cover on private lands in the form of grasslands enrolled in the USDA Conservation Reserve Program or native rangelands. These areas lack wetland habitat. Depending on topography and soil conditions, there is potential for creating shallow impoundments as well as restoring drained wetlands. Artificial wetlands are generally constructed in drainages with very gradual slopes to provide shallow wetland habitat for shorebirds and waterfowl. In some areas, reservoir complexes have been



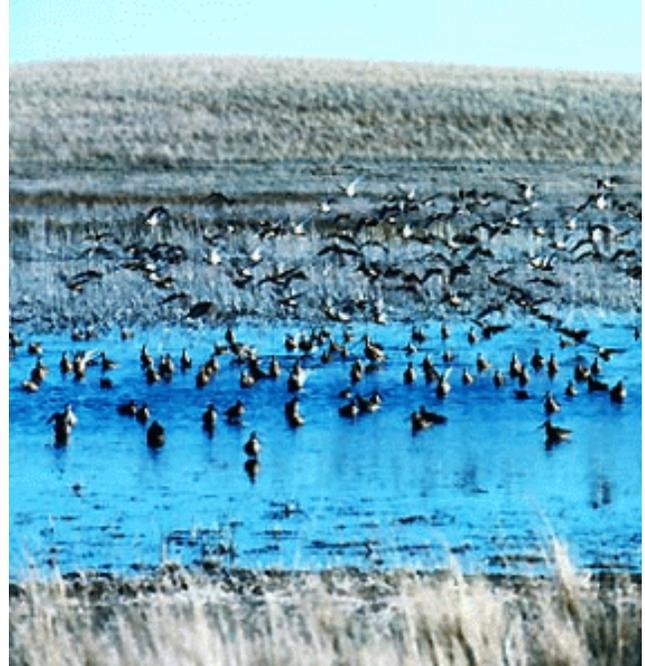
constructed that have many of the productive characteristics of natural wetland complexes. Establishing additional wetland habitat has been a key objective of the Northeast Montana Prairie Pothole Joint Venture Project.

The average cost for wetland restoration is \$150 per acre. Upland enhancements cost approximately \$10 per acre to complete.

Partners

In addition to the private landowners who are the foundation of the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program, other key partners in the Upper Missouri Coteau Focus Area include:

Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks
Montana Department of Transportation
Montana Department of Environmental Quality
Montana Department of Natural Resources
Ducks Unlimited
Pheasants Forever
Montana Chapter of the Nature Conservancy
Montana Native Plant Society
Environmental Protection Agency
Natural Resources Conservation Service
Cooperators from the North American Waterfowl Management Plan
The Fort Peck Tribes



Accomplishments

Over the past 12 years, approximately \$3,500,000 has been spent on habitat work affecting more than 140 square miles within the Focus Area. The primary objective has been to improve waterfowl and waterbird production by improving habitat and/or protecting productive grassland-wetland complexes. Projects developed in northeastern Montana in cooperation with over 230 landowners have laid a broad foundation for continued work on private lands.

Wetland Restoration	331 Sites	4,950 Acres
Upland Enhancement	165 Sites	49,555 Acres

Our cooperative efforts with Natural Resources Conservation Service offices have also resulted in a number of new projects. These multi-agency projects have resulted in sharing ideas and costs so as to provide a better product at less expense to the partners involved.

Future Needs

- Approximately 15,000 acres of wetlands could be restored or established on private or tribal lands.
- Approximately 300,000 acres of grasslands could be restored or enhanced within this Focus Area on private and tribal lands.
- Strengthen our working relationship with the Fort Peck Tribes with a focus on the Manning Lake wetland/native prairie complex.

Missouri Coteau (4,500,000 acres)

