

## ***Restored wetlands giving new life to waterfowl, wildlife***

As our country developed into the most agriculturally productive nation in the world in the 1900s, more than half the nation's wetlands were drained. In some states, more than 90 percent of the native wetland habitat was converted to farmland. The wetlands were drained with public and government support in an effort to expand agricultural production, particularly in the first half of the century. Not surprisingly, waterfowl numbers dropped as wetlands were drained. More recently, especially in the past 10-15 years, better knowledge of the values of wetlands has led to public opinion and policy changes to restore wetlands rather than continue to drain them. And, of course, as wetlands are being restored, waterfowl and wildlife are responding.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Wetlands Reserve Program has helped private landowners restore more than a million acres of wetlands since 1992, averaging more than 100,000 acres a year. These restored wetlands give benefits on a continental scale to migratory birds. Many birds nesting in Canada or on restored WRP sites in North Dakota and New York also winter in Louisiana or Mexico and Central America.

A scenario that's being repeated across the country in varying scales comes from the Raft Creek Bottoms along the White River in Arkansas. In the first year of a new 7,000 acre wetland restoration, more than half a million waterfowl visited the site. The following spring, 20,000 shorebirds foraged in the mudflats and bald eagles nested in the trees. Similarly, birds flocked to the Red Slough in Oklahoma when 7,500 acres were restored by local landowners. More than 250 species of birds have now been sighted, including some first-time nesters in the state such as wood storks, willow flycatchers and white ibis.

In addition to wildlife benefits, research has shown that wetlands trap 50 percent of dissolved phosphate, 70 percent of dissolved nitrates, and up to 40 percent of dissolved organic nitrogen.

For more information, stop at our office at 4505 George Blvd. or visit our website at [www.highlandsswcd.org](http://www.highlandsswcd.org), or visit the NRCS Wildlife Habitat Management Institute's website at [www.whmi.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.whmi.nrcs.usda.gov) or the NRCS home web site at [www.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov).

### **Wildlife Ways**

#### **Did you know....**

The USDA has helped private landowners restore more than a million acres of wetlands in the U.S. since 1992. The restorations help tens of millions of migratory and nesting waterfowl as well as other wildlife species.