

MORRIS WETLAND MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

Morris, Minnesota

ANNUAL NARRATIVE REPORT

Calendar Year 1988

U.S. Department of the Interior

Fish and Wildlife Service

NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM

REVIEW AND APPROVALS

MORRIS WETLAND MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

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ANNUAL NARRATIVE REPORT

Calendar Year 1988



[Signature]
Wetland Manager

3/10/89
Date

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Refuge Supervisor Review

3/13/89
Date

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Regional Office Approval

3/20/89
Date

INTRODUCTION

The Morris Wetland Management District (WMD), originally established in 1963 as the Benson WMD, includes 230 Waterfowl Production Areas (WPA's) totalling 45,666 acres in fee title ownership. The Morris office also administers approximately 14,700 wetland acres of Waterfowl Management Easement lands. The fee and easement areas are scattered throughout Big Stone, Lac Qui Parle, Pope, Stevens, Swift, Traverse and Yellow Medicine Counties. The headquarters is located four miles east of Morris, Minnesota, on the 861 acre Long Lake-Edwards WPA.

The topography of west-central Minnesota is extremely diversified, ranging from the granite outcrops of the Minnesota River bottoms to the rolling hills of Pope County. The flat agricultural land of the Red River Valley of the north blends into the transition zone between the tall grass prairie and the eastern deciduous forest. Soils of the region are generally productive which contributed to the historically high concentrations of breeding waterfowl. With the advent of modern agriculture, over 60 percent of the original wetlands were drained and nearly 100 percent of the native grasslands were converted to cropland.

As a part of the Minnesota Wetlands Complex the primary objective of this District is to acquire, develop and manage habitat for waterfowl production and maintenance. Waterfowl species that commonly breed in this area include blue-winged teal, mallard, pintail, wood duck, redhead and canvasback. The district also contains good populations of ring-necked pheasant, gray partridge and white-tailed deer. Another high priority objective is to provide habitat for native plants and animals and to provide for wildlife diversity. Waterfowl Production Areas are open to public hunting and a variety of other wildlife oriented uses.

High public use occurs on WPA's only during hunting seasons. The areas receive their greatest use on opening days of waterfowl, pheasant, and deer hunting seasons.

Of the 45,666 acres of fee title, 15,923 acres consist of marshes. Grasslands comprise 27,650 acres of the district. This category includes 7,646 acres of reseeded native grasses and 6,074 acres of unbroken native prairie. The balance of the existing grassland contains various cover types including brome, quack and alfalfa. Also included in the grassland category are 1,121 acres presently under short term farming agreements. The purpose is to prepare seed beds for future grassland seedings. Croplands account for an additional 682 acres and consist primarily of rest-rotation food plots for resident game.

INTRODUCTION

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A. HIGHLIGHTS

Farm Bill work dominates staff efforts.

The dry weather conditions continue in 1988 and the wet cycle of the mid-80's is definitely over. (Section B)

Numerous summer temperature records broken by abnormally hot weather. (Section B)

Krantz Lake restored after many years of frustration. (Section J.3)

Over 200 marshes restored on private lands. (Section C.3B)

Major Ducks Unlimited Project completed on the Edwards-Long Lake area. (Section I.1)

Swampbuster battles intensify. (Section C.3B)

Demonstration area plans initiated. (Section H.6)



1988 will long be remembered as the "year of marsh restoration." Site of largest restoration done this year, Pope County. 4/29/88 BLA 88-1

B. CLIMATIC CONDITIONS

Overall, the year of 1988 was only 1.1° warmer than average, but will be remembered for the extremely hot and dry summer. Temperatures during the June-August period broke the all-time high record for the summer averaging 73.2° , considerably above the average for this period of 67.4° . The previous record was 72.9° set in 1933. The total number of days when the daily maximum reached or exceeded 90° reached 41. Previous high records of days 90°F or greater were 40 in 1976, 43 in 1934, and 42 in 1933. Temperatures were normal or above for 7 of the 12 months.

Precipitation for 1988 totaled 17.49 inches, 6.29 inches below normal. This placed 1988 as the 12th driest in the 102-year weather record history at Morris. The precipitation for the growing season (April 1 through August 31) totaled 9.23 inches, far below the long-term average for this period of 15.71 inches. This placed 1988 as the 6th driest growing season ever recorded. Lower totals were recorded in 1926, 1934, 1936, 1976, and 1987. Total snowfall for 1988 was 35.8 inches, very close to the average of 38.5 inches. The 1988 precipitation and temperatures are shown graphically on pages 8 and 9.

January temperatures averaged 5.6° , 2.4° below the 100-year mean. The high temperature for the month was 38° on the 17th and the low was -24° recorded on both the 6th and 7th. Snowfall for the month totaled 10.5 inches, somewhat above the average of 7.8 inches.

February continued the cold pattern set in January with below normal temperatures for the first half of the month. Temperatures for the month averaged 9.2° , 3.6° below the 100-year mean. The high temperature for the month was 45° recorded on both the 27th and 29th. The low temperature was -25° on the 11th. Snowfall for February totaled 3.6 inches, about half the long-term mean of 6.9 inches.

Overall the month of March was very mild. Temperatures for the month averaged 30.1° , 3.4° above the long-term mean. The high temperature of March was 54° on the 23rd and the low was 3° on the 14th. Snowfall for the month totaled 7.8 inches, very close to the average of 7.9 inches. The general snow cover disappeared about the middle of the month, but considerable frost was left in the soil at the end of the month. The total snowfall for the 1987-88 winter was 29.8 inches, about 80 percent of the normal winter snowfall of 38.5 inches.



Marsh conditions in mid-April gave no hint of the hot, dry summer that was to follow. 4/16/88 BLA 88-2

Temperatures during the month of April averaged 43.6° , which was exactly normal. However, there was a lot of temperature variation in the month. The high temperature was 84° on the 9th, which was a record high temperature for that date and the second highest temperature recorded at Morris so early in the season. The low temperature for April was 15° on the 18th, which was a record low temperature for that date. Precipitation for April totaled 0.57 inches, far below the long-term mean of 2.26 inches. There was only a trace of snow for the month. Soil moisture readings taken on April 18 at the West Central Experiment Station showed very low stored soil moisture levels.

May temperatures averaged 64.4° , which was 8.4° above the 100-year mean. This was the third warmest May on record exceeded only by 66.0° in 1977 and 66.9° in 1934. The high temperature for the month was 93° recorded on the 29th and on 5 days the daily maximum reached at least 90° . The low temperature for the month was 30° recorded on the 13th. Precipitation for May totaled 1.71 inches, 1.26 inches below the average of 2.97 inches.

The hot, dry weather of May continued through June. Temperatures during the month of June averaged 73.9° , 8.1° above the mean. This was the 2nd warmest June on record exceeded only by 75.2° recorded in 1933. The high temperature was 104° recorded on the 25th. This was a record maximum for that date and also the warmest temperature recorded at Morris since 109° on July 18, 1940. The maximum daily temperature reached 90° or greater on 14 days in June. The average number of days 90°F or greater for the entire summer is 13. The minimum temperature

for the month was 44° recorded on the 9th. Precipitation for June totaled 0.49 inches. This was the third driest June on record with only 1900 with 0.32 inches and 1920 with 0.04 inches being drier. Normal precipitation for June is 3.96 inches. It became obvious that the wet cycle was over as marsh levels had dropped very rapidly and 80 percent of our basins were dry.



Lack of precipitation and hot winds take their toll.

6/88 AGA 88-3

July 1988 was one of the hottest months ever recorded at Morris. Temperatures during the month averaged 74.7° , 3.8° above the 100-year mean. This placed July 1988 as the 8th warmest July on record at Morris. The daily high temperature reached or exceeded 90° on 13 days in July. The high for the month was 102° recorded on both the 7th and 28th. The low temperature for the month was 50° recorded on the 11th. Precipitation for July totaled 1.83 inches, 1.68 inches below normal.

The very warm temperatures of the summer of 1988 continued through the middle of August and then shifted to a more normal range. The high temperature for the month was 103° recorded on the 1st and the daily highs reached or exceeded 90° on 9 days. Daily high temperature records were tied or broken on the 1st, 2nd, 12th, 16th, and 17th. The low temperature for the month was 40° recorded on the 28th. The daily low temperature record was tied on the 29th with a temperature of 41° . The monthly average temperature was 71.1° , 2.4° above the long-term mean. Precipitation for August returned to a more normal pattern with a total of 4.63 inches, 1.62 inches above normal.



Natural prairie marsh management at work. Two years ago high water drowned the trees surrounding these Rolling Forks WPA (Pope County) marshes and now it is time for nature's draw down.
8/31/88 BLA 88-4

September was the first month with below normal temperatures since February. The monthly average was 58.2° , 0.8° below the long-term mean. The high temperature for the month was 89° recorded on the 12th and the low temperature was 35° recorded on the 13th. Precipitation for the month totaled 4.65 inches, 2.20 inches above the average. This was the wettest September since 4.80 inches recorded in 1965 and the second consecutive month with above normal precipitation.

Temperatures during October averaged 41.6° , 5.6° below the normal of 47.2° . The high temperature for the month was 80° recorded on the 15th and the low was 12° recorded on the 27th. Precipitation for the month was 0.46 inches, 1.28 inches below the long-time average. Snowfall for the month was 0.3 inches.

November temperatures averaged 27.7° , 2.0° below the normal of 29.7° . The high temperature for the month was 56° recorded on the 4th and the low was -5° recorded on the 28th. Precipitation for the month was 1.07 inches, 0.10 inches above the long-time average of 0.97 inches. Snowfall for the month was 8.0 inches, 3.1 inches above the average of 4.9 inches. Measurements made just before the soil froze about the middle of November again showed very low soil moisture levels.

Temperatures during December averaged 16.3° , 1.1° above the 100-year mean. The high temperature for the month was 46° recorded on the 3rd and the low was -15° on the 29th. Total snowfall for December was 5.6 inches, slightly below the long-term average of 6.7 inches.

COMPARATIVE WEATHER DATA - MORRIS, MINNESOTA - 1987 & 1988

	<u>Monthly Average Temperature</u>			<u>Total Precipitation</u>			<u>Snowfall</u>		
	<u>1988</u>	<u>1987</u>	<u>Aver.</u>	<u>1988</u>	<u>1987</u>	<u>Aver.</u>	<u>1988</u>	<u>1987</u>	<u>Aver.</u>
January	5.6	17.9	8.0	.70	.63	.68	10.5	8.2	7.8
February	9.2	29.5	12.8	.20	.32	.67	3.6	4.0	6.9
March	30.1	32.2	26.7	.82	1.57	1.13	7.8	5.3	7.9
April	43.6	51.2	43.6	.57	.39	2.26	Tr	0	3.3
May	64.3	61.0	56.1	1.71	2.92	2.97	0	0	0.2
June	73.9	68.0	65.8	.49	1.87	3.96	0	0	0
July	74.7	72.0	70.9	1.83	1.81	3.51	0	0	0
August	71.1	65.6	68.7	4.63	1.46	3.01	0	0	0
September	58.2	59.0	59.0	4.56	2.89	2.20	0	0	.1
October	41.6	41.7	47.2	.46	.42	1.74	0.3	0.2	0.7
November	27.2	35.0	29.7	1.07	.82	.97	8.0	Tr	4.9
December	16.3	20.9	15.2	.45	.67	.68	5.6	7.7	6.7
	43.2	46.2	42.0	17.49	15.77	23.78	35.8	25.4	38.5

Precipitation for the growing season, April 1 - August 31:

1988 = 9.23 inches

1987 = 8.45 inches

Average = 15.71 inches

Highest temperature: 1988 = 104° (June 25)
1987 = 98° (August 1)

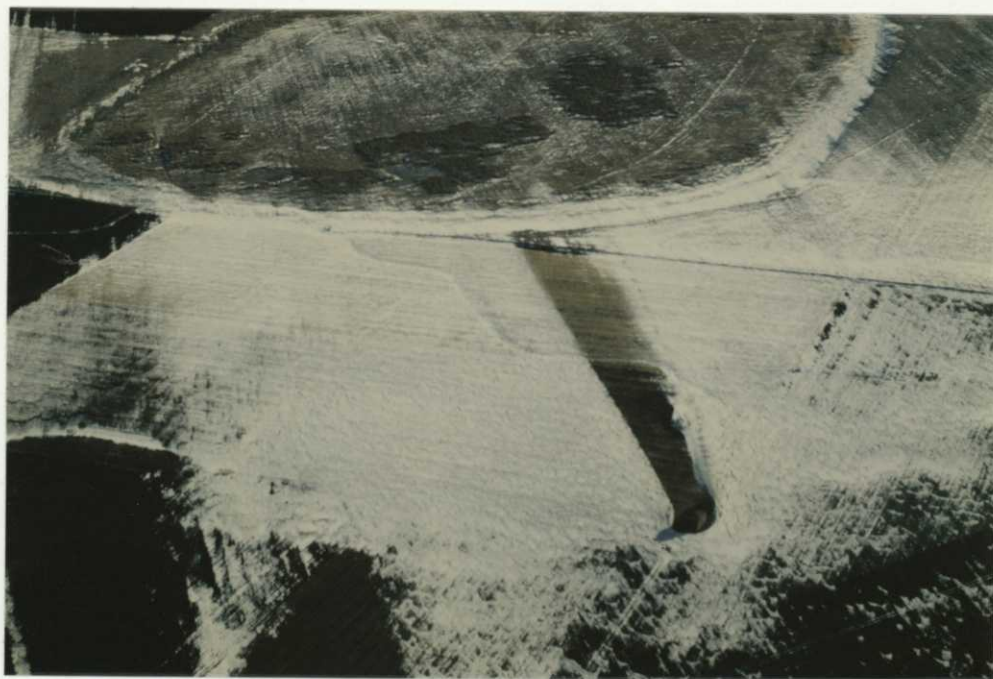
Lowest temperature: 1988 = -25° (February 11)
1987 = -22° (January 23 and 24)

Total days maximum temperature 90° or above: 1988 = 41
1987 = 16
Average = 13

Total days minimum temperature 0° or below: 1988 = 51
1987 = 10
Average = 47

Last spring frost: 1988 = May 13 (30°)
1987 = April 5 (30°)
Average = May 11 (32°)

First fall frost: 1988 = October 4 (25°)
1987 = October 3 (26°)
Average = September 25 (32°)



12/7/88 BLA 88-5

Interesting weather patterns in the Morris District.



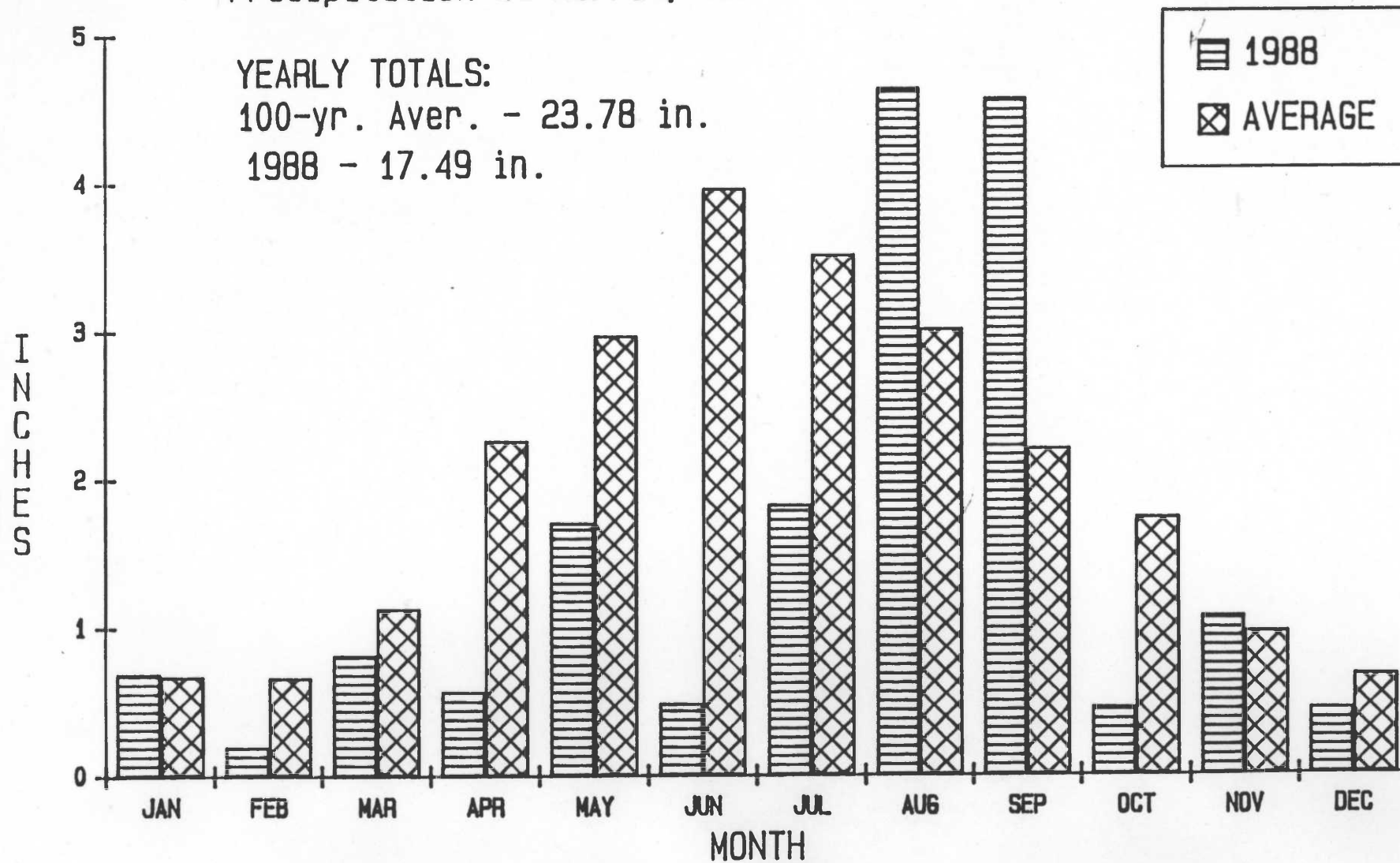
3/88 BLA 88-6

Precipitation at Morris, MN

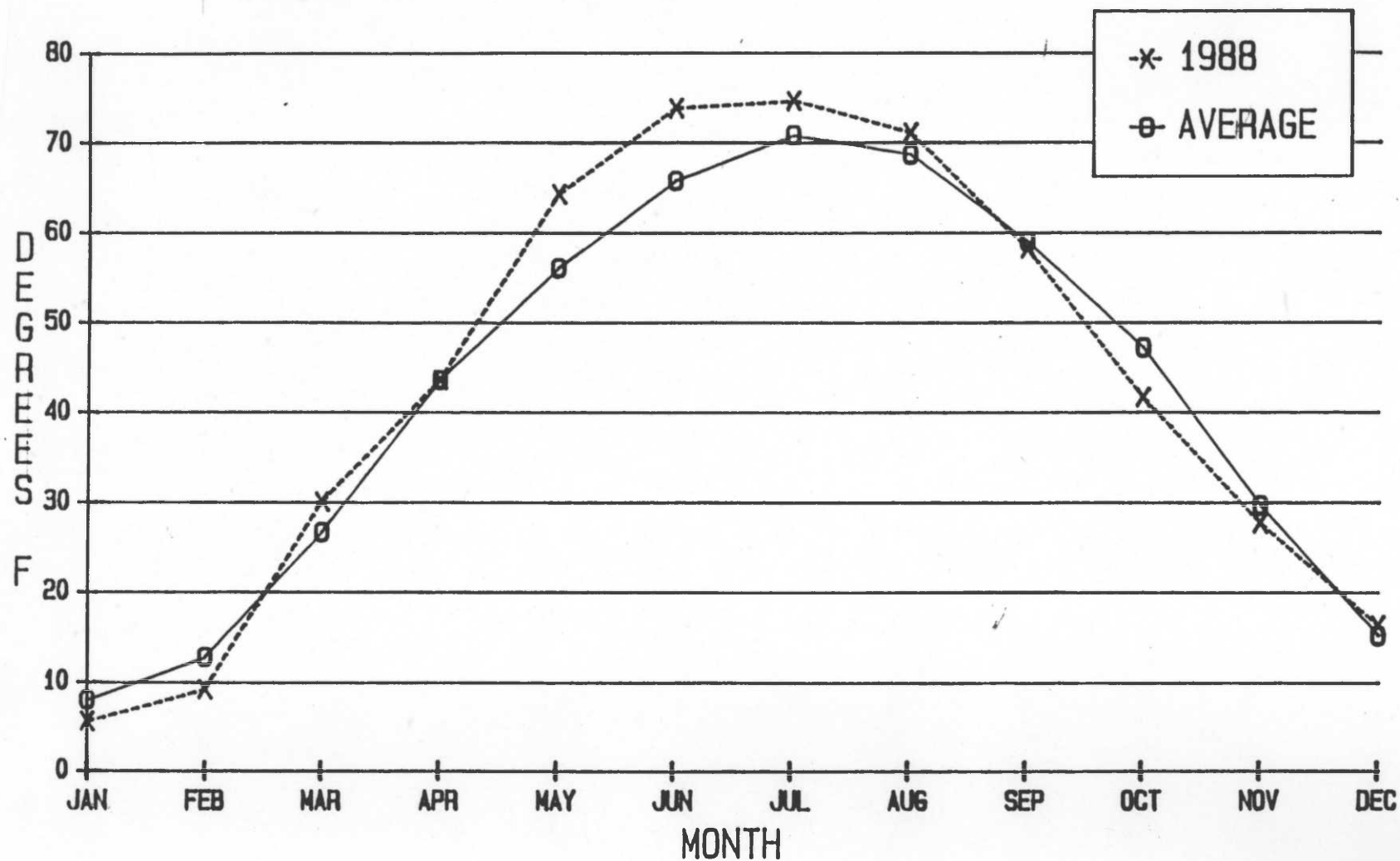
YEARLY TOTALS:

100-yr. Aver. - 23.78 in.

1988 - 17.49 in.



Temperature at Morris, MN



C. LAND ACQUISITION

1. Fee Title

More fee acres were acquired in 1988 than in 1987 but the figures are misleading because 352 acres of the 1988 acquisition total of 1,035 acres were acquired from The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and not from private individuals. However, fee acres are fee acres and we were happy to acquire the roundouts that TNC had previously purchased for the Service. The 12 tracts purchased, including the TNC tracts, averaged 86 acres each. Two of the tracts (Lane, Big Stone County, and Fahl, Swift County) were new starts with the 10 remaining tracts being roundouts. The current fee acreage of 45,665.62 represents 58 percent of the Morris District's goal acres.

WATERFOWL PRODUCTION AREA ACREAGE - MORRIS WMD - 1988

<u>County</u>	<u>Acquisition</u> <u>Total 12/31/87</u>		<u>Acquisition</u> <u>Total 12/31/88</u>		<u>Goal</u> <u>Acres</u>
	<u>Units</u>	<u>Acres</u>	<u>Units</u>	<u>Acres</u>	<u>Acres</u>
Big Stone	59	9,639.18	60	10,048.14	15,600
Lac Qui Parle	15	2,748.19	15	3,026.82	9,650
Pope	63	13,316.04	63	13,316.04	22,250
Stevens	53	8,728.04	53	8,835.26	12,850
Swift	26	6,580.38	27	6,820.38	10,800
Traverse	10	3,528.98	10	3,528.98	6,720
Yellow Medicine	2	90.00	2	90.00	1,260
Total	228	44,630.81	230	45,665.62	79,130

In 1988 the number of willing seller contacts dropped significantly from past years. Even though the farm economy is considered in fair to poor condition, very few landowners were interested in selling property. The list of approximately 25 possible sellers who were available from the 1987 carry-over list were quickly processed by the Litchfield and Fergus Falls Acquisition Offices. The majority of these owners had changed their minds about receiving an offer or refused our offers because they felt the Service wasn't offering enough money. There were several reasons for the lack of willing sellers. For example, land prices were very low and if people could hang on to their property by any means, they were going to because owners felt the market had to go up. In addition, commodity prices were up, the government farm programs were excellent, and the Conservation Reserve Program was going strong. All these factors contributed to the low interest in people selling their property.

The future of fee acquisition is unknown. The farm economy, acquisition funding, Land Exchange Board attitude, and many other factors will influence the future. However one thing is certain, and that is the fact that wetland habitat still exists for the Morris District to reach its acquisition goal of 79,130 fee acres. Stay tuned!



The Strei fee tract is roundout for the Henry WPA, Big Stone County. 8/31/88 BLA 88-7

Our fee acquisition continued to focus on significant wetland complexes for rounding out existing waterfowl production areas. An occasional new start may be purchased if an outstanding complex has been overlooked in our original inventory.

We operate under the procedural agreement between the Service and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR). The agreement requires that each fee and easement tract be presented to the respective county board of commissioners for certification. Thus, county boards can offer their input into the acquisition process. But, final approval still rests with the Minnesota Land Exchange Board (MLEB) which is comprised of the Governor, Auditor, and Attorney General.

The resource status and politics of our acquisition program for fee and easements varies by county as follows:

Big Stone County

Four tracts totaling 408.96 acres were acquired in 1988 in Big Stone County. A TNC tract of 73 acres is included in that total. It would seem from these figures that things are still wonderful in Big Stone - but that is not the case.

For some unknown reason the county commissioners suddenly have become difficult. There probably are several reasons. Tax loss is an issue in nearly every county and Big Stone is no exception. Maybe the frequency of our visits with fee tracts worries them. Or was it the Bengston Lake fee trade for an easement that upset the commissioners? Whatever happened or whatever reason, the usual friendly atmosphere has been replaced by a harder line. Our plan is to continue to take tracts in and test their attitude. Hopefully two newly elected commissioners will refresh the board's outlook and the Service can continue to buy in the county with the highest quality wetlands in western Minnesota.

All tracts are presented to the Big Stone County Zoning Board for certification before meeting with the county commissioners. This board creates no difficulties for fee or easement acquisition.

Lac Qui Parle County

Three fee tracts, all TNC tracts, totaling 278.63 acres were purchased in 1988. The county commissioners were informed of this purchase only and did not need to provide an official opinion to the Land Exchange Board. County officials were pleased about this purchase because TNC pays no taxes and the Service will at least partially refund lost revenue to the county. Currently we have no major problems with the Lac Qui Parle County Commissioners but this relationship is a day-to-day thing.

Pope County

The good relationship that has been built up during the past few years suddenly deteriorated because of the revenue sharing problem. The Barchenger tract wasn't approved at the county level and apparently the non-certified tract won't be presented to the Land Exchange Board. The future of fee acquisition in Pope County will not be favorable until revenue sharing is 100 percent. As in other counties, the interest in selling property is very low.

Stevens County

Three roundout fee tracts totalling over 107 acres were certified with few objections by the commissioners. Tracts have continued to be certified with few problems. Our relationship with the commissioners remains excellent. Prompt response to county problems and weed control complaints probably will assure a positive relationship with the commissioners in this county.

Swift County

Two tracts (Fahl and Swingseth) totaling 240 acres were purchased by the Service and certified by the county commissioners. Normally nothing is easy in Swift County but the acquisition process actually proceeded rather smoothly. The purchase from Fahl included a roundout tract for the Loen WPA and a new start located one mile north of the Loen WPA. The Swingseth tract is an addition to the Svor WPA. All tracts in Swift County are case by case and anything can happen. Revenue sharing will probably have a major influence on the Service's future success at certification.

Traverse County

No fee work was completed in Traverse County in 1988.

Yellow Medicine County

No fee work was completed in Yellow Medicine County in 1988.

2. Easements

More easements were taken in 1988 than in the past few years. Approximately 366 wetland acres were added by the 10 easements taken in 1988. This compares to 111 wetland acres added by 5 new easements in 1987. Under the terms of a wetland easement, the Service purchases the rights to burn, drain or fill wetlands from a willing seller. Easements of highest priority have been those which would preserve wetlands within two miles of a waterfowl production area. However, wetlands located near Minnesota Department of Natural Resource's Wildlife Management Areas (WMA's) or other acceptable nesting cover can also be protected by easement. Easements are taken on some marshes that had earlier been identified for fee roundout of waterfowl production areas to avoid possible drainage.

EASEMENT PROGRAM STATUS - MORRIS WMD - 1988

<u>County</u>	<u>Easements</u>	<u>Wetland Acres</u>	<u>Total Easement Acres</u>	<u>Total Goal Acres</u>
Big Stone	160	5,690	20,601.72	47,640
Lac Qui Parle	12	470	1,397.56	23,540
Pope	132	5,772	21,663.43	54,180
Stevens	39	966	3,126.36	6,090
Swift	36	717	2,725.50	14,540
Traverse	30	1,041	3,486.96	8,440
Yellow Medicine	<u>1</u>	<u>17</u>	<u>80.00</u>	<u>7,860</u>
Total 1988	410	14,673	53,081.53	162,290
Total 1987	400	14,307	51,791.19	162,290
Total 1986	395	14,196	51,514.76	162,290
Total 1985	389	14,114	51,223.02	162,290
Total 1984	381	13,894	50,482.21	162,290

The majority of the landowners who contacted our office from 1985 through 1987 were more interested in actually selling land to the Service rather than placing wetlands under easement. However, the recent decrease in land prices has now discouraged fee sellers and easements are again gaining popularity as a method for landowners to reduce economic pressures.

Easements were taken in Big Stone, Swift, Pope, Stevens and Traverse Counties in 1988. The county boards of commissioners must review all easement proposals for certification as with fee tracts. Except for Swift County, easement certification is usually routine. There seems to be less opposition to easements in comparison to fee tracts because the land remains "on the tax rolls" and no upland is taken out of agricultural production. In general, county commissioner opposition has been minimal in the past several years.



Canada geese know how to take advantage of the easement program.
5/11/88 BLA 88-8

The future of the easement program is directly related to local economic conditions and the funds and manpower available to our Division of Realty. Activity may increase in 1989 if the land-owners who permitted wetland restoration on their Conservation Reserve Program lands are contacted by our realtors. The exact schedule for this work hasn't been formalized yet.

There are numerous wetlands that are still available and that need protection. Hopefully this program will continue until goal acres are acquired or there are no unprotected basins remaining in western Minnesota.

3. Other

Of the five possible trades involving fee tracts being pursued in 1988, four were completed or are near completion. Hopefully the transactions can be completed in 1989. The waterfowl production areas involved include:

McNally Slough WPA, Stevens County

The McNally Slough trade will provide for the exchange of uplands on the west side of the unit for a roundout tract on the south side of the unit. A minor problem on ditch maintenance has delayed the completion of this trade.

Svor WPA, Swift County

An exchange with Mr. Luverne Simonson has been in the works for a long time but the exact trade conditions have not been agreed upon by the parties involved. This trade, if completed, would protect the key marsh of the Svor WPA complex. No progress was made on this trade in 1988.

Sedan WPA, Pope County

The 40 acre Sedan WPA included a portion of a large marsh that has been partially drained. This private drainage project violated the protected waters law of the State of Minnesota as well as reducing the value of the WPA. The landowner who violated the law went bankrupt and the new owners have placed the total farm acreage under a Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) agreement. The Service worked out an agreement that deeded the Sedan WPA to the new owners in exchange for an easement on numerous wetland basins which were restored by the Service in 1988, including the large, partially drained marsh.

Blue Mounds WPA, Pope County

A proposed trade with the Minnesota DNR is being processed. This trade will allow Glacial Lake State Park to roundout boundaries at two locations along the south boundary. This trade will also relieve a hunter trespass problem that has developed on a co-owned wetland where hunters enter the park, which is closed to hunting, via the WPA. The Fish and Wildlife Service will gain fee ownership of land that the Minnesota DNR owns within the boundaries of the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge. An access to Artichoke Lake that is part of the Artichoke WPA, Big Stone County, is also being transferred to the Minnesota DNR as part of this trade agreement.

Bentson Lake WPA, Big Stone County

Less than four acres of fee property located along the south boundary of Bentson Lake WPA were exchanged for a wetland easement on five restored wetland basins on private property. The Service completed restoration on the five basins under a free lease agreement. This trade protects the newly restored wetlands in perpetuity.

A. James R. Cook

Mr. James R. Cook (Investment Rarities, Inc.) has been active in marsh habitat preservation and development, especially in Pope County. Mr. Cook bought farms and developed habitat specifically for waterfowl. Ditch plugs have been constructed and farm fields converted to nesting cover. Cook, a waterfowl enthusiast, has also purchased land in the Dakotas and other midwestern states. Biologists manage Cook's property, which is posted and closed to hunting. Two farms that were covered by Fish and Wildlife Service wetland easements were purchased by Mr. Cook. We support his efforts in the battle to preserve wetlands and provide habitat for waterfowl production. Some farmers are very concerned about his activities because he is competing with local farmers. Wildlife certainly has benefited, however. Local rumors indicate that Cook has financial problems but we are not certain. For the first time he has approached us on taking easements on his existing and restored wetlands so maybe the rumors are valid.

B. Farm Bill

There was no doubt about our number one priority in 1988 - **FARM BILL**. We talked Farm Bill, worked Farm Bill, and some of us even dreamed Farm Bill. Fortunately all of the work produced some dividends. Farm Bill work can be divided into three categories: private land wetland restoration, FmHA deed restrictions and swampbuster.

Private Land Wetland Restoration

In 1988, restoring wetlands on Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) lands received top priority. Landowners with land enrolled in CRP in Big Stone, Pope, and Stevens Counties were contacted by mail to solicit interest in restoring wetlands. Of 574 landowners contacted, 142 expressed interest. We explained our program to all interested landowners and examined their land for possible restorations.



Identifying wetlands became more difficult as spring growth progressed. 6/16/88 AGA 88-9



A type III wetland, two acres in size, is drained by this invisible ditch. 6/16/88 AGA 88-10

All potential wetlands were surveyed and staked. Due to drought conditions, CRP land was opened to haying. Mowing machines destroyed many of our survey markers, forcing us to re-survey and re-stake over 50 wetlands. The process was repeated when CRP land was opened for haying a second time.



Haying on CRP land disturbed nesting waterfowl along with survey markers for many wetland restoration sites.

7/1/88 SJD 88-11

Construction of ditch plugs began on June 20 and ended on November 10, 1988, with the completion of 208 restorations. Wetlands averaged one to two acres in size. All ditch plugs were built to Soil Conservation Service (SCS) specifications to qualify as an acceptable practice on CRP lands.



Ditch plugs are constructed to meet SCS specifications including 10 foot wide tops and 3:1 side slopes.

4/19/88 BLA 88-12

In Stevens County wetlands were restored with a service contract issued by the regional office. In Big Stone and Pope Counties, wetlands were restored by force account or by small contracts issued by our office because of special equipment needs. In 1988, we restored 199 wetlands on CRP land and nine wetlands on non-CRP private land.

PRIVATE LAND WETLAND RESTORATION - MORRIS WMD - 1988

<u>County</u>	<u>CRP Restorations</u>		<u>Other Private Restorations</u>		<u>1988 Total Restorations</u>	
	<u>Basins</u>	<u>Acres</u>	<u>Basins</u>	<u>Acres</u>	<u>Basins</u>	<u>Acres</u>
Big Stone	12	28	0	0	12	28
Lac Qui Parle	0	0	0	0	0	0
Pope	61	377	9	50	70	427
Stevens	126	218	0	0	126	218
Swift	0	0	0	0	0	0
Traverse	0	0	0	0	0	0
Yellow Medicine	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total 1988	199	623	9	50	208	673
Total 1987	26	45.5	7	33.5	33	79
	===	=====	==	=====	===	=====
Grand Total	225	668.5	16	83.5	241	752

We would like to thank everyone who helped with wetland restorations on private land including Dozer Operators Mark Cunard from DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge and Terry Papple from Seney National Wildlife Refuge.



Some of the 23 wetlands restored on the Thorkelson CRP land in Pope County. 8/31/88 LEL 88-13

The approximate total amount of FY88 monies spent on salaries, contracts, and supplies to restore wetlands on private land was \$92,465. Although the private land restoration program required considerable work and money, we were pleased to be involved with this exciting program of restoring wetlands on private land.

FmHA Deed Restrictions

Wetland Manager Radtke continued to evaluate Farmers Home Administration (FmHA) tracts and submitted nine deed restrictions in 1988. Six tract restrictions were processed by Farmers Home Administration by the end of this reporting period and three were still pending. Eight ditch plugs were constructed on two tracts (Berens and Mitteness) in Swift County. Seven tracts had low waterfowl habitat values but were restricted by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources because of high value for upland and big game animals.

FmHA ACCOMPLISHMENTS - MORRIS WMD - 1988

<u>County</u>	<u>Farms Reviewed</u>	<u>Service Deed Restrictions</u>	<u>MDNR Restrictions</u>	<u>Service Wetland Plugs Completed</u>
Big Stone	2	0	1	0
Lac Qui Parle	3	0	1	0
Pope	2	2*	0	(2)
Stevens	1	1*	0	(1)
Swift	8	5	2	8
Traverse	0	0	0	0
Yellow Medicine	<u>6</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>0</u>
Totals	22	9	7	8

*Service restrictions submitted but pending.

() Number of plugs planned but not completed.

Our relationship with the local FmHA officials has been excellent except in Pope County. The FmHA supervisors have been helpful and supportive in getting restrictions processed. The official in Pope County apparently doesn't like wetlands and is trying to stall the process.

Each tract is inspected by the Wetland Manager and the local Minnesota Department of Natural Resource's Wildlife Manager. Cooperation with the DNR in the Morris district has been excellent.

Swampbuster

The swampbuster portion of the Farm Bill Legislation is subdivided into three areas: wetland appeals, commenced exemption requests, and turn-ins of potential converted wetlands. The legislation clearly defines the Fish and Wildlife Service's role as that of a consultant, but in many situations the Service representative is recognized as the primary authority present preventing drainage.

Wetland Appeals

The wetland appeal process was used when a landowner challenged the Soil Conservation Service's (SCS) determination that some of his property should be classified wetland. As a consultant, a Service employee and the SCS representative would visit the site, review Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service (ASCS) slides, check available wetland inventories, and confirm or reverse the initial SCS determination. Most were upheld. If the landowner still disagreed, he could again appeal to the next level of authority.

In 1988, the Morris Wetland staff reviewed 159 landowner appeals involving 519 wetlands. This compares with 147 land owners having 337 wetlands in 1987. This responsibility was shared among six staff members. Much variability occurred between county SCS offices with Swift County having the most appeals.



Big Bud, as this machine is affectionately known by those it serves, is a graphic example of current drainage capabilities. Note the large roll of tile in the background.

5/6/88 LEL 88-14

Commenced Exemption Requests

Another portion of the Farm Bill Swampbuster legislation allowed landowners or ditch authorities to complete drainage of previously started or committed drainage projects if specific criteria were met. Again, as a consultant, a Service representative participated in appeal hearings held before the county ASCS committee. Following a presentation of testimony and evidence, the Service representative provided a recommendation to the committee. All county committees except Pope County usually followed the Service recommendation.

In 1988 Biologist Lewis attended nearly all of the 56 landowner appeal hearings held. This compares to two appeal hearings held in 1987. Since the deadline for landowners to file hearing requests has now passed, this difficult phase of swampbuster implementation should be over.

A wetland saving precedent was set when the National Committee over-ruled the State ACP Committee and denied exemption of a ditching project on Yellow Medicine County Ditch #18 (see news article at the end of the narrative report).

Turn-ins of Potential Converted Wetlands

Another key role is probably best described as the "informant and watchdog" role. Swampbuster legislation states that if a landowner seeds a crop in a converted wetland, he loses eligibility for his Federal farm subsidy payment. Usually thousands of dollars are at stake. One large operator claimed he could lose \$230,000 in Federal subsidy if his alleged violation of converting a 2.5 acre wetland was upheld. ASCS is given responsibility of enforcing this harsh swampbuster penalty. As stated, the Service's role is uncomfortably one of informant and watchdog.

Since many possibly converted wetlands were observed by and reported to Service personnel, a procedure was developed for "tactfully" bringing these to ASCS attention. The "Wetland Impacts Report" form was developed. This report was submitted to the appropriate County ASCS office. This then prompted ASCS/SCS to act. Fifty two turn-ins on 114 wetlands were made. Since wetland conversion, seeding, and participation in Federal farm programs are all required before the withholding of benefits penalty can be imposed, only a few of the 52 Wetland Impact Reports submitted were temporarily determined violations. Some payments were delayed until appropriate loopholes were found; eventually all received their subsidy payments.

The penalty of total loss of benefits is viewed as too harsh for the crime. Lacking other more palatable options, conspicuous loophole seeking has occurred. In short, this phase of Swampbuster is not working well since the wetland remains drained and the subsidy payment is made anyway. It appears restoration must become a key part of the inevitable leniency.



8/31/88 BLA 88-15

Photos such as these of tiling activity (above) and ditching (below) were submitted to ASCS along with the Wetlands Impact Report as evidence of possible wetland conversion. Also note burned wetland (below). Although undesirable, burning is not regulated by the Farm Bill



11/13/87 LEL 88-16

D. PLANNING

1. Master Plan

After purchase of a new tract, an on-site inspection is done to examine existing man-made structures and habitat conditions. Then, all supporting historical, topographical, biological, and geological information is assembled. Needed habitat developments and public use facilities are outlined and compiled into a Land Use Development Plan.

5. Research and Investigations

Morris WMD NR88 - "Nest Dragging Investigation"

The same waterfowl production areas in Stevens County (Pomme de Terre River, Pomme de Terre Lake, Edwards, Long Lake) searched in 1987 were searched in 1988. Nest search operations began on May 2 and 3, and concluded July 5 and 6. All fields were searched four times. Nests were revisited on foot ten days after each nest search. The standard cable and chain drag as described by Higgins et al. (1977) was used in locating nests.

Intensive seasonal predator management was conducted on Edwards and Long Lake Waterfowl Production Areas. Predators removed are summarized in the table below.

PREDATOR REMOVAL - MORRIS WMD - 1988

<u>Predators Removed</u>	<u>Long Lake WPA</u>		<u>Edwards WPA</u>	
	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>
Skunk	7	12	5	8
Mink	0	0	1	0
Fox-adult	2	2	0	3
Fox-juvenile	15	7	1	0
Raccoon	19	9	8	8
Franklin's Ground Squirrel	4	3	11	6

Twenty-nine nests were located during 1988. One of these nests was destroyed during search operations. Twenty-six of the nests were blue-winged teal and the other three were mallard.

The overall observed hatching success was 29 percent (8 of 28). Based upon a total of 362.5 nest exposure days, the daily survival rate was 0.9448. Using 34 days as the expected life of a successful nest (weighted for above species), the hatch rate for all species was 14.5 percent (Mayfield corrected).

The table below compares nesting between areas with seasonal predator management and no predator management.

SEASONAL PREDATOR REMOVAL - MORRIS WMD - 1988

	Seasonal Predator Management	No Predator Management
Acres searched	119	103
Total nests	11	17
Successful nests	3	5
Mayfield success	11.4%	16.6%
Exposure total nests	26.3	30.1
Mayfield nest density	.22	.29

The following narrative was written by Soil Conservationist Bernie Angus who had the opportunity to witness Franklin's ground squirrel (*Citellus franklini*) activity at a blue-winged teal nest the day of hatching.

A duck was flushed during search operations but the nest could not be found. I returned at 10:30 a.m. the following day. The hen flushed and I found the nest. Seven ducklings were hatched, three eggs pipped and one egg unpipped. I covered up the nest and left. The nest was re-visited at 3:30 p.m. to obtain pictures. The hen flushed again but landed in the grass about 25 feet away (not too far from the marsh edge). The ducklings left the nest bowl and were about one foot away from the nest. I moved about five feet away and crouched down in the tall native grass to await the return of the duck. Approximately 10 minutes later the grass rustled about thirty feet from the nest. The movement continued, stopping occasionally, and once moving a foot or two quite fast. The movement was parallel to the marsh, about fifteen feet from the marsh edge. About 15 feet from the nest the animal made about a 90° angle and moved toward the nest. About five feet from the nest it could be identified as a Franklin's ground squirrel. It approached the ducklings and made a quick movement towards them. One duckling made a slight squawk-like sound. I then stood up and the ground squirrel ran off. I approached the nest and saw that the ducklings were together. They were placed back in the nest bowl and covered up. I then went back to the area I was kneeling in before. The ground squirrel was back in about 5-10 minutes. It came up to the nest, made another quick movement into the bowl, and was gone. I waited about 10 minutes more. The female blue-winged teal flew back to within 10 feet of the nest. She moved closer to the nest and made a soft calling sound and the ducklings left the nest. I waited until she got to the water which took only a few minutes. She had eight ducklings in the water. I went back

to the nest and crouched down about five feet away. There was one whole egg left in the nest bowl. About ten minutes later the Franklin's ground squirrel came back to the nest and started to eat the egg. I moved towards the nest and the ground squirrel ran off. It had eaten a small slit into the egg. The egg had a live duckling inside. A second Franklin's ground squirrel had also started moving in closer to the nest during that time. I then stood one foot from the nest. Within 10 minutes a ground squirrel was back. It saw the me, stopped about ten feet away, stood up, looked at me, flicked its tail several times, and then moved closer to the nest. It came into the nest on the side opposite me. I took a photograph and the ground squirrel ran about 10 feet away. It turned around and came back. This time I let the ground squirrel take the egg in its mouth. Another photograph was taken and the ground squirrel ran off with the egg but dropped it one and a half feet from the nest. By this time I was out of film. As I left the nest site I saw a Franklin's ground squirrel moving through the grass about twenty feet from the nest. Two ducklings were unaccounted for; there were ten membranes in the nest bowl and only eight ducklings made it to the water.



Franklin's Ground Squirrel having lunch.
6/16/88 BLA 88-17

Morris WMD NR88 - "Predator Night-Light Survey"

In 1988, the Morris District began a night-time spotlight survey for predators. The results of this annual survey will be used as an index of predator populations in the surveyed area. Generally, the survey technique is as follows. A team of two drives 10-15 miles per hour along a designated 25 mile route. Each team member casts the beam of a 200,000 candle power hand-held spotlight on fields adjacent to the road. When an animal is seen, usually because of the light reflecting from the eyes, the species, habitat type, location, and time are recorded. The survey is performed on the same route three times during the spring. Each time, we began the survey one hour after sunset.

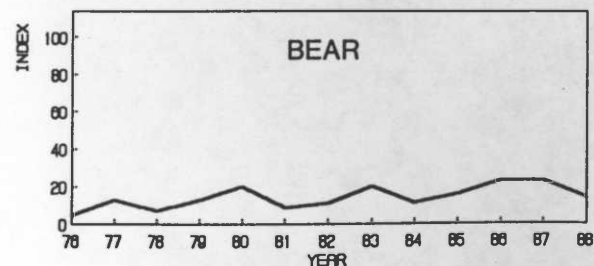
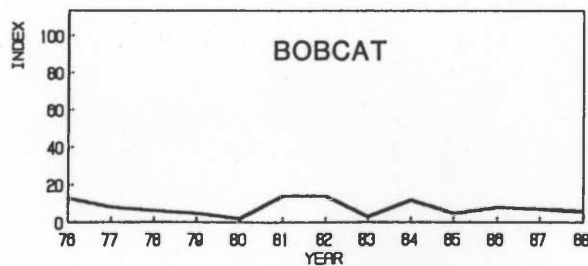
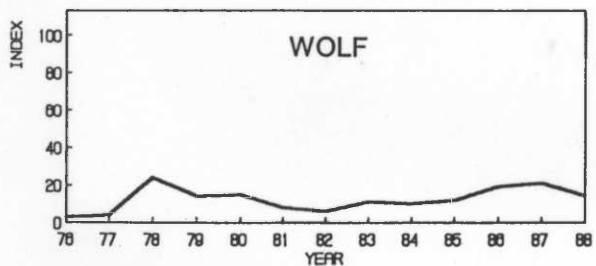
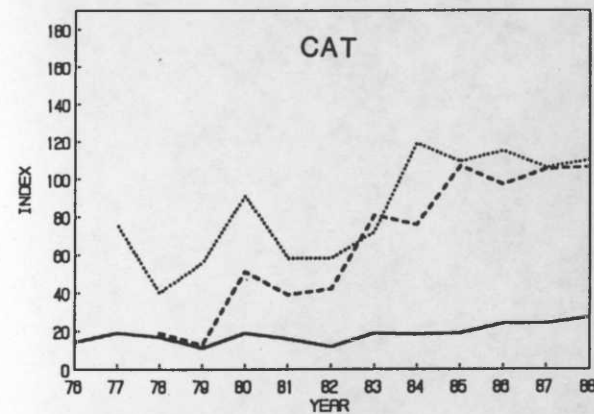
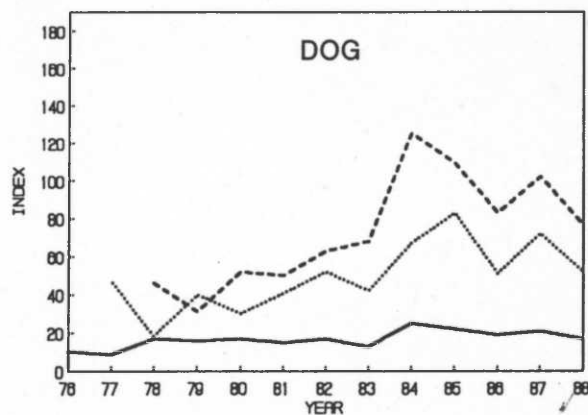
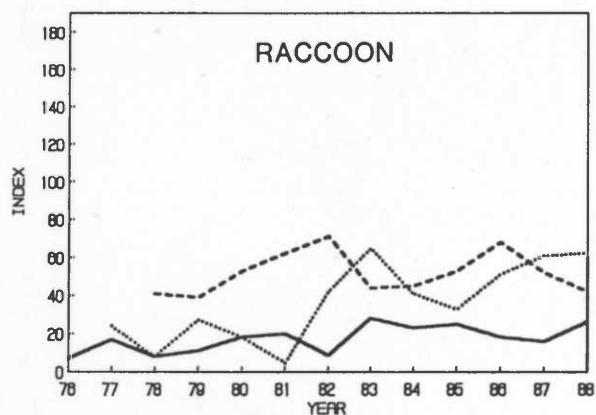
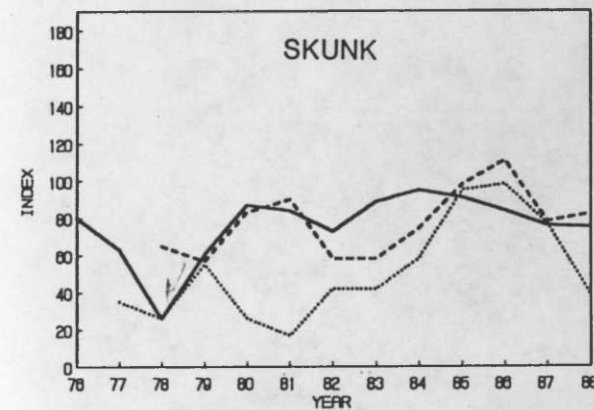
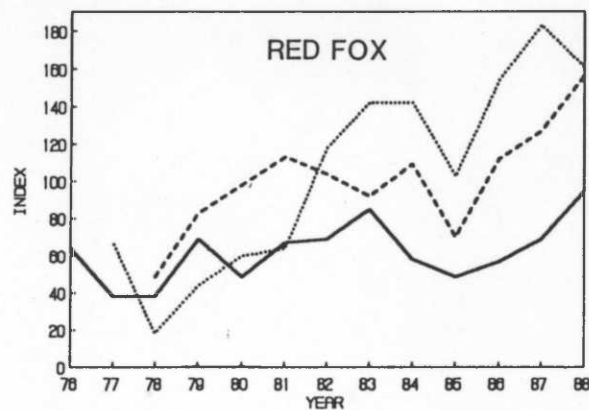
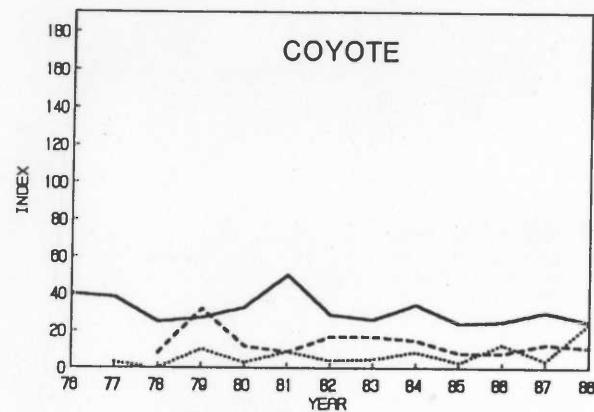
Since this was the first year of the survey, the results are not very meaningful. We saw a total of 8 fox, 3 raccoon, and 12 "house" cats during the 3 runs of the survey. We saw no skunk.

Morris WMD NR88 - "Scent Post Survey"

Under the coordination of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR), the Morris Wetland Management District conducted scent post surveys on 15 routes in four counties. Similar surveys are run throughout Minnesota each year to monitor predator and furbearer populations. Our participation increased from the four routes normally run to 15 routes to fulfill part of an agreement between the Minnesota DNR and the Service for our predator trapping program (see Section G.15). Statewide, the scent post survey serves as an index to predator and furbearer populations by identifying tracks of mammalian visitors to sites baited with a scented pellet.

The most frequent visitors to our plots were red fox followed in decreasing order of frequency by dogs, cats, raccoon, and skunk. No coyotes visited our sites.

The "Farm Zone" of the state, which includes most of our district, showed several interesting trends. The red fox index remained very high. The skunk index declined 49 percent. Coyote visits in the Farm Zone increased several-fold.



FOREST ———
 TRANSITION - - - -
 FARM

Figure 2. Scent post visitation indices for nine species in the Forest, Transition, and Farmland Survey Zones, 1976-1988.

Graphs produced by Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.

E. ADMINISTRATION



(7) (8) (9)
 (2) (6) (3) (1) (5) (4) (10)

1. Alfred L. Radtke, Wetland Manager, GS-12, PFT.
2. Gaylord J. Bober, Assistant Wetland Manager, GS-11, PFT.
3. Bernard L. Angus, Soil Conservationist, GS-11, PFT.
4. Larry E. Lewis, Wildlife Biologist, GS-11, PFT.
5. Alan G. Anderson, Biological Technician, GS-6, PFT,
E.O.D. 5/2/88.
6. Steven J. Delehanty, Refuge Manager Trainee, GS-7, PFT.
7. Pamela S. Steinhaus, Biological Technician, GS-5,
PFT-Seasonal.
8. Karen M. Stettner, Secretary, GS-5, PFT.
9. Rodney G. Ahndt, Motor Vehicle Operator, WG-7, PFT.
10. Victor H. Gades, Tractor Operator, WG-5, PFT.



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TEMPORARY PERSONNEL

1. Marty J. Baker, Biological Aid TFT, 5/16/88-9/02/88.
2. Michael R. Casey, Biological Aid, TFT, 4/4/88-11/11/88.
3. Kevin L. Mixon, Biological Aid, TFT, 4/4/88-11/11/88.
4. Jon P. Wofford, Biological Aid, TFT, 4/4/88-11/11/88.
5. John D. Paulson, Biological Aid, TFT, 8/29/88-11/11/88.
6. Gerald C. Lipinski, Pest Controller, TFT, 4/7/88-7/22/88.
7. Gary E. Neumann, Pest Controller, TFT, 3/14/88-7/22/88.
8. John D. Paulson, Pest Controller, TFT, 3/14/88-7/22/88.



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YCC PERSONNEL

1. Dennis W. Osborne, Work Leader, GS-5 6/06/88-8/12/88.
2. Jay Melberg, Enrollee 6/13/88-8/05/88.
3. Jeremy Kellen, Enrollee 6/13/88-8/05/88.
4. Janice Miller, Enrollee 6/13/88-8/05/88.

OTHER

1. Jeff Zurn, Work Study, 6/13/88-9/09/88.
- 2. Kristi Yanish, CETA, 6/28/88-8/19/88.



Jeff Zurn

1. Personnel

MORRIS WMD STAFF SIZE, FY84-88

	Full Time	Seasonal Full Time	Temporary GS & WG	Other Programs*
FY88	9	1	9	5
FY87	9	1	5	5
FY86	8	2	5	11
FY85	8	1	6	12
FY84	8	1	5	13

*YCC, CETA, Work Study, etc.

The permanent staff remained at ten positions this year. The only change on the staff in 1988 was the addition of Alan Anderson, A GS-6 Biological Technician who replaced the retired John Hutchinson.

Five temporary Biological Aids were hired to assist with operation and maintenance and run biological programs. A Social Service Assistant supervised our three YCC enrollees. In addition, a work study student and a CETA worker were added as summer laborers. Three temporary trappers were hired as wage grade employees to handle the predator control program.

The current, permanent staffing pattern is not adequate for the station's work load. Temporary positions have been needed for the heavy summer work load. YCC has helped fill part of these staffing needs, but this program has been drastically reduced in recent years. The Farm Bill work, continuing fee and easement acquisition, backlog of habitat restoration, and various old maintenance projects have resulted in a very hectic and wild year for an over-worked staff. It appears that 1989 will be much like 1988. It sure is fun but wish we had more time to enjoy it!!

2. Youth Programs

The 1988 Morris YCC program was an eight week, non-residential camp consisting of three enrollees and one Social Service Assistant as work leader. The enrollees ranged in age from 16 to 18. One of the three enrollees had farm experience. The Social Service Assistant worked directly with the environmental education and safety programs, and also with the enrollees in the field on each work project.

Ten different types of projects were worked on at nine different waterfowl production areas and the office complex over the eight-week period. These activities included painting and weather proofing at the Morris shop, surveying on CRP lands, assisting the Minnesota DNR in weed control, nest dragging, fence removal and construction, construction of several parking lots and gates, and several field trips. The enrollees appreciated the variety of work and the opportunity to travel in a four-county area.



YCC crew constructing parking lot on Wente WPA, Stevens County. 6/15/88 BLA 88-18

Safety played an important role in day-to-day events. All personnel were required to wear steel-toed boots, long pants, gloves (usually leather), hard hats, and long-sleeved shirts for their personal protection. Some aspect of safety was discussed daily with an occasional intensive session. There were no major injuries in the eight-week period, although several individuals received minor cuts.

Environmental Awareness (EA) played an important role in the day-to-day routine. Upon entering the program the enrollees were given the Environmental Awareness Test. At the end of the eight-week session they were again tested. An effort was made to incorporate EA into the daily schedule. Additional opportunities were taken to interview staff members on their areas of expertise as well as visiting Big Stone National Wildlife Refuge and Glacial Lakes State Park where the local managers briefed them on the importance of their areas.

Staff working hours totaled 376. Total enrollee working hours equaled 960. Total number of miles driven was 1,703 with no vehicle damage.

MAJOR YCC ACCOMPLISHMENTS - MORRIS WMD - 1988

Building Site Clean-up	1 Site
Weed Control	92 Acres
Fence Removal	.75 Miles
Boundary Fence Construction	.2 Miles
Parking Lot Construction	3 Lots
Remove Beaver Dams	1 Dam
Facility Maintenance	3 Projects



1988 YCC enrollees and staff. Work Leader Dennis Osborne,
Enrollees: Jay Melberg, Jeremy Kellen, Janice Miller.

6/15/88 BLA 88-19

3. Other Manpower Programs

One Work Study student from the University of Minnesota, Morris, Jeff Zurn, was employed at this station from June through mid-September. Most of Jeff's time was spent in the upkeep of the headquarters area, our two nature trails, and seeding of ditch plugs on CRP restorations.

Kristi Yanish, working under the CETA program, helped out in the office in June, July and August.

5. Funding

The station's total FY88 budget was slightly greater than the FY87 level, primarily because of the Farm Bill money. The Refuge Operation and Maintenance funding continues to be inadequate and many projects must be left undone. Inflation and increased salary costs reduce the money available for management and development. Compared to the "old days" our funding is excellent but our obligations, acreages, projects, and responsibilities have increased many fold and therefore we need increased funding.

MORRIS WMD FUNDING LEVELS - FY84-FY88 (Dollars in Thousands)

FY	1260	1220- 1240	3110	YCC	Rehab. Const.	1120	Total Budget
88	504.3*	-0-	5.0	5.1	9.0	57.5	580.9
87	507.6*	5.0	5.0	5.3			522.9
86	453.6*	-0-	5.0	20.6	5.0		484.2
85	449.6	-0-	5.0	17.7	-0-		472.3
84	352.0	-0-	5.0	14.6	800.0		1171.6

*Includes ARMMs & RPRP

An active acquisition program also causes funding problems. Development monies are inadequate to provide materials and staff for the new acres purchased. New fee lands purchased in 1988 will need surveys, ditch plugs, cleanup, seeding and posting in 1989. A backlog of this work continues to increase as each year goes by. The BLHP program left the District's equipment and facilities in excellent shape. Hopefully, future funding can maintain this condition and provide for needed development.

6. Safety

There were **NO** accidents of any kind at this station during the past year. We were fortunate. With three trappers working seven days a week for 3 1/2 months, and 5 months of heavy equipment operations, our exposure to accident situations was vastly increased. The entire staff contributed to our safe record.

The station Safety Committee, consisting of three staff members, rotates every three months and remains the most viable part of our safety program. This committee is responsible for planning and presenting our monthly safety meetings, and conducting inspections and accident investigations for the station.

Following is a list of topics of our monthly meetings:

Winter Driving	Boat Safety
Safe Driving	Fire Extinguishers
Seat Belts	Station Threat Plan
Driver Safety	Safe Office Working Conditions
Hunter Safety	Safe Lifting Techniques
Railroad Crossings	Rural Driving Hazards

The station now stands at 6,853 days without a lost-time accident.

7. Technical Assistance

Considerable technical assistance involved Farm Bill work, covered in C.3.

Other technical assistance included:

- Assisting local Soil and Water Conservation Districts select sites for Minnesota's RIM program, a marginal agricultural land/wetland restoration land retirement program (staff).
- Reviewing applications for the Waterbank Program with the Soil Conservation Service (staff).
- Assisting Minnesota Department of Natural Resources establish property lines for their purple loosestrife spraying program (Bober).
- Assisting the University of Minnesota select demonstration/ test plots for loosestrife control (Angus).
- Advised Minnesota Department of Transportation on prescribed burning of native grass seedings (Angus).
- Planning committee for a local Wildlife Festival (Angus).
- Serve on Stevens County Comprehensive Water Planning Committee (Lewis).
- Planning committee "Future of CRP-Forum" (Radtke).
- Krantz Lake negotiating team (Lewis and Radtke).

- Assisting Army Corps of Engineers on potential wetland fill violations (Lewis).
- Serving on Minnesota Abandoned Well Capping Committee (Bober).
- Surveying CRP wetland restoration sites for Big Stone National Wildlife Refuge (Anderson).
- Assisting Minnesota Department of Natural Resources recover game fish from pools in the Pomme de Terre River (Steinhaus, Gades).



Fish being removed from Pomme de Terre River due to drought-caused low water levels. 8/5/88 BLA 88-20

F. HABITAT MANAGEMENT

1. General

Habitat types in the Morris Wetland Management District are summarized in the following table.

HABITAT SUMMARY - MORRIS WMD - 1988

<u>Cover Type</u>	<u>Acres</u>
Wetland	15,923
Cropland	682
Grassland	27,650
Timber	<u>1,411</u>
Total	45,666

Type IV marshes comprise 52 percent of the wetland acreage and type III's, 29 percent. These marshes, combined with numerous type I and II wetlands, offer a wide variety of waterfowl habitat. The upland:wetland ratio for our district is 1.8:1. Upland nesting cover is comprised of 7,646 acres of seeded natives, 6,074 acres of native prairie, 12,809 acres of introduced grass and/or legume seedlings, most of which are at least 15 years old, and cropland on new fee purchase property. The seed for the planted native grass fields has been primarily of Nebraska-Kansas origin. Seed fields of South Dakota 149 (Forestburg) switchgrass, North Dakota 444 Indiangrass, South Dakota 27 big bluestem, and indigenous big blue and Indian grass are now established and will provide the bulk of future seed.

2. Wetlands

Most permanent wetlands were dry by the opening of waterfowl hunting season. Temperatures during the June-August period broke the all-time high record for the summer averaging 73.2°, the average for this period being 67.4°. The total precipitation for 1988 was 17.49 inches, 6.29 inches below normal. This placed 1988 as the 12th driest (1987 was the 4th driest) in the 102-year weather record history at Morris.

3. Forests

The Morris Wetland Management District lays within what was once the "tall grass prairie". Thus, less than four percent of the fee acreage is covered by timber.

Of the 1,411 acres of timber, the majority consists of older farm groves and shelterbelts. Stevens County Pheasants Forever chapter provided the funding for a 3.5 acre wildlife shelterbelt planted on Pepperton WPA.

4. Croplands

In 1987, 682 acres of cropland were managed as resident wildlife food plots. These plots were located on waterfowl production areas identified by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources as significant wintering areas for ring-necked pheasant and white-tailed deer. All food plots were located near shelterbelts and/or cattail sloughs which provide escape and winter cover. Plots were located on soils and slopes which have minimal soil loss potential. Most of the food plots consisted of two, ten-acre fields where corn was planted in one field and a grass mixture was seeded in the other. These fields are then alternated every three to five years. This rotation has helped reduce disease and insect problems in corn and also provided nesting cover in the grassland field. Occasionally soybeans are planted one year instead of corn to also break an insect or disease cycle. The cooperator is responsible for all field work, seed, fertilizer and weed control. The wildlife's (government's) share has been left standing in the field in alternate rows. The alternate rows help disperse snow and reduce the chances of the entire plot being buried in snow. The cooperator is allowed to harvest any corn or soybeans remaining the following spring.

FOOD PLOT SUMMARY - MORRIS WMD - 1988

<u>County</u>	<u>No. WPA's With Plots</u>	<u>Total Acres in Corn, Soybeans</u>	<u>Total Acres In Plots</u>
Big Stone	10	121	221
Pope	4	46	66
Stevens	12	106	206
Swift	6	80	105
Traverse	<u>4</u>	<u>42</u>	<u>84</u>
Totals	36	395	682

The Stevens County Pheasants Forever chapter financed winter food plots and feeder cribs throughout the county, predominantly on private land. Two plots were planted on Edwards Waterfowl Production Area (Stevens County).

5. Grassland

Approximately one-half of our grasslands are in a vigorous and productive state for waterfowl nesting. This includes reseeded native grasses, managed native prairie, and introduced cool-season grasses and legumes which have been seeded in the last ten years and are actively managed with fire, grazing or haying. The remaining grassland habitat consists of former crop fields seeded to various introduced grasses and legumes and some prairie in need of management. Approximately 500 acres are seeded to native grasses each year. New fee acquisition has provided the acres to be seeded. Occasionally new acquisition land is cash rented back to the original landowner. The purpose is to have soybeans planted, making a good seed bed for native grasses.

SPECIAL USE PERMITS USED FOR SEEDBED PREPARATION MORRIS WMD - 1988

<u>County</u>	<u>WPA</u>	<u>Acres</u>	<u>Revenue</u>	<u>Expiration Date</u>
Big Stone	Anderson	80	\$1,200	11/30/88
	Jacobson	27	540	05/30/90
	Moulton Lake	35	350	11/30/88
	Redhead Marsh	36	360	11/30/88
Pope	Westport	70	1,400	11/30/88
Stevens	Long Lake	64	480	11/30/88
	Mud Creek	30	900	06/30/89
	Mud Creek	14	420	11/30/88
Swift	Brady	48	1,440	11/30/88
	Brady	<u>7</u>	<u>210</u>	11/30/88
Total		411	\$ 7,300	

Weed control on new seedlings is very critical. A combination of herbicides (roundup, 2,4-D, banvel), burning, and haying are used to aid the establishment and maintenance of both native and cool-season grass and legume stands. For native grass establishment and maintenance, prescribed burning reduces competition from unwanted cool-season grasses but may also stimulate broadleaf weeds. This may necessitate the subsequent application of 2,4-D.

CHEMICAL TREATMENT OF SEEDINGS - MORRIS WMD - 1988
(in Acres)

<u>County</u>	<u>2,4-D</u>	<u>2,4-D & Barvel</u>	<u>Roundup & 2,4-D</u>
Big Stone	610	763	42
Lac Qui Parle	408	165	331
Pope	193	87	110
Stevens	110	---	---
Swift	376	---	---
Traverse	138	58	---
Yellow Med.	<u>26</u>	<u>---</u>	<u>---</u>
Total	1861	1073	483

All chemicals were applied by ground driven equipment. The low bid for applying 2,4-D was awarded to Clinton Ag Service, Clinton, Minnesota. A total of 1835 acres were sprayed under this contract at a total cost of \$14,317.50. The vendor also furnished the chemical. Clinton Ag Service also applied the 2,4-D and barvel combination in the fall. A total of 1073 acres were treated at a total cost of \$6,949.00. The government supplied the chemicals. The roundup and 2,4-D combination were applied in-house.

Most areas are sprayed twice with 2,4-D. The application of 2,4-D/barvel mix was applied in the fall to most of the areas that were treated with 2,4-D earlier in the summer. The fall chemical application is targeted toward Canada thistle. The thistle is quite susceptible to chemical at that time. The problems of volatilization and drift are also lower at that time of year and agricultural crops are not as susceptible to injury from the barvel. Ground application is preferred over aerial application because more water per acre can be applied (10 gallons vs 4 gallons). The increased water per acre aids in penetrating the vegetation and landing on the target species.

a. Reseeded Native Grasslands

Since 1973 the Morris Wetland Management District has planted 7,646 acres of native grasses of which 488 were seeded in 1988. The primary mixture consisted of: switchgrass 1.0, big bluestem 2.5, Indiangrass 2.2, little bluestem 0.29, side oats grama 0.2, green needle 3.0, and western wheat 1.0 (all expressed in pounds pure live seed/acre). All fields seeded in 1988 were farmed for at least three years prior to seeding. Fields were sprayed with one pound active ingredient of roundup and 1/4 pound active ingredient of 2,4-D per acre prior to seeding. Truax drills were used on all seedings. Seedings were sprayed force account with 1/2 pound active ingredient 2,4-D in July or August. Germination of 1988 seedings was less than five percent in all fields due to the drought.

NATIVE GRASS SEEDINGS - MORRIS WMD - 1988

<u>County</u>	<u>WPA</u>	<u>Acres</u>	<u>Seeding Date</u>
Big Stone	Artichoke	25	6/03
	Johnson	30	6/03
Stevens	Edwards	41	5/24
	McNally Slough	75	6/02
	Mero	90	5/25
	Pepperton	17	6/09
	Wente	90	5/09
Traverse	Robinhood	<u>120</u>	6/06-08
Total		488	

Native grass seed plots were not harvested in 1988. Fields were checked in early September and seed heads did not fill due to the dry summer.

b. Cool-Season Grasslands

A total of 270 acres was seeded to introduced cool-season grasses in 1988. Cooperative farming agreements were used to seed this acreage. The cooperator furnished all seed and used small grain as a nurse crop. The small grain was harvested at maturity and the straw chopped at the time of harvest or removed within 10 days after harvest. One field of 124 acres was seeded in the fall instead of the spring with the small grain. The small grain stubble was disced and the grass seed applied with a fertilizer spreader on September 1. The seed was then harrowed in. An excellent germination resulted.

The following table summarizes cool-season seedings in 1988.

COOL-SEASON GRASS SEEDINGS - MORRIS WMD - 1988

<u>County</u>	<u>WPA</u>	<u>Acres</u>	<u>Date</u>
Stevens	McNally Slough	42	4/?
	Pepperton	4	4/25
Swift	Loen	100	4/?
Traverse	Robinhood	<u>124</u>	9/1
Total		270	

The mixture for cool-season grass seed downs consisted of the following: tall wheatgrass 7 lb., orchard grass 3 lb., and tall fescue 3 lb. (all expressed as pounds per acre).

c. Native Prairie

The original upland vegetation within the Morris District was tallgrass prairie. The total native prairie acreage on waterfowl production areas was 6,074 in 1988. The areas vary in size from less than one acre to 311 acres. Active management consisting of prescribed burning and grazing has been limited to the larger acreages. The small remnants have not been actively managed because of size, location, and staff limitations.



Always a day brightener. 6/30/88 BLA 88-21



A continuing struggle for native prairie plants. Native prairie plowed fall, 1986. 8/29/88 BLA 88-22

7. Grazing

Controlled grazing has been used as an alternative to prescribed burning. The grazing period utilized by the Morris Wetland Management District has been May 1 to May 31. Objectives are to remove litter and reduce competition from cool-season grass invaders. Seven waterfowl production areas were grazed in 1988.

GRAZING SUMMARY - MORRIS WMD - 1988

<u>County</u>	<u>WPA</u>	<u>AUM's</u>	<u>Upland Fee/AUM</u>	<u>Acres</u>
Big Stone	Eids Lutheran	50	\$2.75	47
	Hillman	64	\$2.75	57
	Redhead Marsh	34	\$2.75	46
	Tangen	26	\$2.75	43
	Thomson	50	\$2.75	90
	Twin Lakes	137	\$2.75	121
Lac Qui Parle	Hastad	<u>58</u>	\$2.75	<u>75</u>
Total		419		479

8. Haying

Haying has been used on a limited basis for weed control and upland habitat management. It has been utilized on pure stands of alfalfa where chemicals cannot be used to control broadleaf weeds. The hay must be cut after July 5 and the second cutting taken before September 1. The July 5 date was selected to allow most of the nesting to be completed and still result in control of Canada thistle. However, there may be some years that Canada thistle will be flowering by this date. Prohibiting cutting after September 1 allows the alfalfa to harden-off and provide residual growth for nesting the next spring.

HAYING SUMMARY - MORRIS WMD - 1988

<u>County</u>	<u>WPA</u>	<u>Acre</u>	<u>Number of Cuttings</u>	<u>Rate/ Acre</u>	<u>Harvest Date</u>
Big Stone	Anderson	20	2	\$10.00	7/07
		20		\$15.00	8/24
	Boehnke	45	1	\$ 7.50	8/18
	Karsky	24	1	\$10.00	7/14
Pope	Krantz Lake	51	2	\$ 7.50	7/13
		7.5		\$15.00	8/17
	Rolling Forks	40	2	\$ 5.00	7/10
		<u>20</u>		\$10.00	8/23
Total		207.5			

9. Fire Management

A total of 247 acres was prescribe burned in 1988. The Morris District was in a state issued fire ban most of the season. The two units burned were for seed harvest of native grass.

PREScribed BURN SUMMARY - MORRIS WMD - 1988 (In Acres)

<u>County</u>	<u>WPA</u>	<u>Date Burned</u>	<u>Native Prairie</u>	<u>Intro. Natives</u>	<u>DNC</u>	<u>Marsh</u>	<u>Total</u>
Stevens	Lamprecht	5/3	3	143	10	81	237
	Schultz	5/3	—	10	—	—	10
Total			3	153	10	81	247

Three wildfires also occurred on waterfowl production areas in 1988. The Lake Emily WPA burned on April 11. Morris District personnel controlled the fire. Part of the Wall WPA also burned on April 11. It started by an adjoining landowner burning trash. The Glenwood Fire Department extinguished this fire. One half of the Hutchinson WPA burned on April 12. This fire also started from private land and was apparently controlled by a private landowner as well.

The Morris staff also assisted the Benson Fire Department in extinguishing a wildfire in Swift County on September 13. Manager Radtke was notified in the evening that the fire was on a waterfowl production area. Six members of our staff assisted the fire department. Two Service fire pumpers were also used and over 50 staff hours utilized to extinguish the fire. Aerial observance of the area indicated the fire was a quarter mile from the unit. A total of 186 acres burned. The fire was all on private land. The Benson Fire Department was impressed with our crew and ability. Public relations certainly benefited from this incident.

10. Pest Control

HOT + DRY = WEEDS

The hot, dry summer resulted in a 60 percent increase in acres treated for pest plants when compared with 1987. We feel this increase was mainly because of the following:

1. Canada thistles increased because the stressed grasses did not compete well.
2. Stressed grasses had less height and thistles were more visible.

As usual, a great amount of staff time and funds were expended in June and July in the control of noxious weeds. Over 150 individual waterfowl production areas were searched for noxious weeds. One hundred twenty-two units required weed control. Each had a map prepared showing both the weedy areas and the crops on the surrounding private property. The larger areas and those with access problems were sprayed by contract. The remaining weedy areas were sprayed by our own staff using an invert sprayer. Compared to ten years ago, our present weed control program is deemed adequate by the county commissioners. Recently, none have used weed control as an issue to deny acquisition.

The majority of the contract spraying was done by Clinton Ag Service, Inc. They sprayed 2,371 acres at a cost of \$18,777.00, or \$7.92/acre. In the past we have used aerial spraying but changed to ground application because the cost is less and control appears better. Ground application uses 10 gallons of water per acre versus only 4 gallons/acre aerially. The increased water gives better coverage in heavy cover resulting in more control of the target species. The one negative aspect of ground application is that the tires mash down the vegetation.

Leafy spurge was sprayed on eleven waterfowl production areas this year. Spurge also appeared to out-grow the stressed grasses and most areas of spurge increased in size and plant density. In May and June 54.8 acres were sprayed for spurge. On Lynch Lake WPA, Swift County, the area infested with spurge increased from under 5 acres in 1987 to over 23 acres in 1988.

Two hundred pounds of the herbicide Spike 5G were used to control invading trees on Edwards WPA, Stevens County, and Hegland WPA, Lac Qui Parle County, during August and September. The herbicide was applied by hand at the rate of two ounces per sapling. Green ash, boxelder, and Russian olive trees were invading many fields of nesting cover. In some cases we are able to control the spread of these invaders by burning.

This year our approach to controlling the spread of purple loosestrife changed from using roundup or rodeo to 2,4-D as the herbicide of choice. Roundup and rodeo controlled the loosestrife but also removed all plants that would compete with loosestrife in the following year. With the present tools and knowledge, we are only able to slightly slow the rate of spread of this plant. This past year saw purple loosestrife added to the noxious weed list in the State of Minnesota. Also, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources had a large spraying program on several major waterways within the district in the hope of checking the spread of loosestrife. We feel the war with loosestrife is lost at this time--major research is needed to find an effective means to control this plant.

In 1988, 60.7 acres on five waterfowl production areas in Pope County were sprayed to hold the loosestrife in check. The rate of spread of loosestrife on private land within the district continues to increase because the plant is found in wet areas and the agricultural community has little incentive to control the plant.



Young purple loosestrife plants. Area was sprayed with rodeo in 1987. Note lack of other species of plants.

6/30/88 BLA 88-23

NOXIOUS WEED CONTROL - MORRIS WMD - 1988

County	<u>Contract</u> <u>Spraying</u>		<u>Force Account</u> <u>Spraying</u>		<u>Mowing</u>		<u>Totals</u>	
	No. WPAs	Acres	No. WPAs	Acres	No. WPAs	Acres	No.* WPAs	Acres
Big Stone	19	870	17	297.2	--	--	33	1167.2
Lac Qui Parle	6	130	4	21.1	--	--	9	151.1
Pope	21	507.5	19	84.4	1	20	31	611.9
Stevens	11	503	27	528	3	84	32	1115
Swift	6	170	5	101.6	1	21	9	292.6
Traverse	7	240	3	12.7	1	35	8	287.7
1988 Total	70	2420.5	75	1045	6	160	122	3625.5
1987 Total	79	1516	71	742	1	10	117	2268
1986 Total	91	1241	76	427	9	240	135	1908
1985 Total	98	1919	61	151	5	50	131	2120
1984 Total	119	1589	37	102	14	198	133	1889

*Same waterfowl production areas may have received both contract and force account control efforts.

13. WPA/Easement Monitoring

a. Easements

EASEMENT ENFORCEMENT SUMMARY - MORRIS WMD - 1988

Cases closed during 1988	6
Cases forwarded for legal action	0
*New fall 1988 violations (unresolved)	1
**Total cases outstanding December 31, 1988	9

*Aerial flights 50 percent completed. Due to weather and Farm Bill work, completion of flights and confirmation of possible violations will be done in spring, 1989.

**Includes four co-owned cases. Action to be taken is pending the outcome of a wetland values study.

There were six cases closed in 1988. They were:

<u>Easement No.</u>	<u>Problem/Solution</u>
BS-33X	Plow furrow drainage/non-maintenance.
BS-64X,1	Fill/removed.
BS-174X	Plow furrow drainage/non-maintenance.
SW-25X	Drain and fill/restored.
T-18X	Drain and fill/restored.
T-25X	Plow furrow drainage/non-maintenance.

Fall easement flights were completed on 50 percent of the district this fall. The remainder will be completed next spring. Less ditching activity was noted on the portion checked and can probably be attributed to weather (drought) and swampbuster regulations. Much of the normal easement enforcement attention has been diverted into Farm Bill Swampbuster activities. The benefits of promoting an effective swampbuster program can be tremendous and save wetlands throughout the United States. During easement flights potential swampbuster violations are also documented and reported to appropriate county ASCS offices.

b. Waterfowl Production Areas

Most waterfowl production area problems are detected during routine work activities or while flying easement checks. Typical problems include farming encroachment, rock dumping, sign damage, vehicle trespass, dead animal and/or garbage dumping, and private drainage affecting waterfowl production area wetlands.

Most problems are caused by neighbors or unknown individuals. The preferred procedure in resolving most problems is to negotiate a solution without creating a neighboring enemy. Legal action is usually a last resort.

The only fee area problem in 1988 receiving legal action was the continuing Krantz Lake WPA case in Pope County. In June 1986 a neighbor dug a 3/4 mile long ditch along the disputed WPA boundary. At least three co-owned wetlands were drained in addition to wetlands on the neighbor's property. The case was turned over to our Law Enforcement Division who, working with the Solicitor and/or U.S. Attorney, must resolve the boundary dispute and then address Service rights regarding their portion of the drained wetlands. Considering the legal complications, it could be a long time before final resolution is achieved!

SUMMARY OF NOTABLE WPA PROBLEMS - 1988

<u>County</u>	<u>WPA</u>	<u>Problem</u>	<u>Action Taken/Status</u>
Pope	Stenerson Lake WPA	Pushing rocks/ trees across boundary.	Neighbor contacted. Debris removed.
Pope	Wall WPA	Drainage of co-owned wetland.	Working with Corps of Engineers. A May 30, 1989 restoration order has been issued.
Stevens	Mau WPA	Trespass with junk pile on boundary.	Neighbor contacted. Junk pile removed/ buried, boundary reposted.

G. WILDLIFE



Yellow warbler on nest. 6/16/88 BLA 88-24

1. Wildlife Diversity

Waterfowl production areas in the Morris Wetland Management District contain a complex of habitat types that help support over 260 species of birds, 55 of mammals, and numerous species of reptiles, amphibians and insects. The keys to maintaining this diversity are habitat preservation, and secondarily, habitat manipulation. Activities that help maintain wildlife diversity on waterfowl production areas in western Minnesota include land acquisition, water level management, prescribed burning, grassland establishment, woodlot improvement and wildlife food plot establishment.

2. Endangered and/or Threatened Species

There were three bald eagles observed in our District during 1988. A pair of bald eagles nested successfully on the Lac Qui Parle State Wildlife Management Area (WMA) in 1988. This WMA is within our district. This is the first reported successful eagle nest in western Minnesota this century.

3. Waterfowl

a. Swans

Tundra swans are a spring and fall migrant through the Morris Wetland Management District. The first spring flock was seen on March 23. The migration seemed to peak on April 2 when many flocks totalling several hundred birds passed over the Morris area.

b. Geese

The first Canada geese were seen in Stevens County on February 28th. The first pair arrived at our headquarters site on March 3.

Canada goose production continues to climb in the district. The first brood of the year was seen on Hutchinson WPA (Stevens County) on May 11. Not many years ago a goose brood was a noteworthy event around Morris. Now most of our waterfowl production areas support at least one pair of geese and many units have several pair. Production from fee and easement acres was estimated at 700.

The Lac Qui Parle goose zone, an area including a state managed goose refuge and Big Stone National Wildlife Refuge, had a large number of Canada geese throughout the fall and into early winter. The fall peak population reached 130,000 in late October. An early hunting season closure combined with mild weather probably enabled the geese to remain in Minnesota. At the end of December, 58,000 geese remained in the area.



Late season geese in Big Stone County, MN. 11/8/88 LEL 88-25

c. **Ducks**

The first ducks of the year, mallards, were spotted on February 22 on an open patch of the Pomme de Terre River, Stevens County. Several other species arrived during the first week of March. These arrivals were several weeks earlier than normal.

The total spring duck population for the state was estimated at 756,000, up from 615,000 last year. Presumably, this increase was due to better water conditions in Minnesota than other parts of the prairie pothole region.

We attempted to examine all 299 of the District's nest baskets during August. The baskets, provided by Ducks Unlimited, have been in place for two nesting seasons. We checked for use by nesting waterfowl and maintenance needs. Because of the drought, many of the baskets were far from water. Still, 18 baskets were used for nesting, all by mallards. Three nests were abandoned; the other 15 nests were all successful. This year, like 1987, we saw no signs of predation. Of the 18 baskets that contained nests, eight were baskets that had also contained nests in 1987. Also, of the 18 baskets that were used in 1988, 15 were located on waterfowl production areas that had basket use in 1987. Fifteen baskets were removed because of bent poles or broken baskets. These will be repaired and set out on units showing previous basket use. Ten baskets were not located due to ice damage, theft, or tall vegetation.

Waterfowl production estimates from fee and easement acres are shown on page 56. Breeding pair estimates for all species except Canada goose and American coot were provided by Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center using results of our Four-Square Mile Survey. Northern Prairie also provided production estimates for mallard, blue-winged teal, pintail, shoveler, and gadwall ducks. We estimated production for other duck species by assuming 60 percent of all hens attempted to nest (less than 100 percent because of drought), 40 percent hen success (50 percent for wood duck), and 5.5 young per brood. For example, 100 pair x 60 percent attempted nesting x 40 percent of the hens successfully nesting x 5.5 young per successful nest = 132 ducks produced.

Breeding populations and production figures for geese and coots were based on old breeding pair surveys and casual staff observations.

PRODUCTION ESTIMATES - MORRIS WMD - 1988

<u>Species</u>	<u>Estimated Number Breeding Pairs</u>	<u>Estimated Production</u>
*Blue-winged teal	4,378	3,240
*Mallard	2,209	851
Wood duck	833	1,374
Redhead	374	494
Canada goose	200	700
Other duck species	743	437
American coot	<u>4,000</u>	<u>8,500</u>
Total	12,737	15,596

*Production figures calculated by Northern Prairie
Wildlife Research Center.



Blue-winged teal ducklings. 6/16/88 BLA 88-26

The most impressive fall migration sight was a flock of roughly 5000 field feeding mallards adjacent to Walden WPA in Pope County. These birds used the same field for several days in mid-November.

4. Marsh and Water Birds



Great egrets are commonly seen on our waterfowl production areas. 8/88 AGA 88-27

Great egrets, great blue herons, white pelicans, and double-crested cormorants are all abundant throughout our district. Other species commonly seen or heard in our district include: black-crowned night heron, pied-billed grebe, western grebe, sora rail, and American bittern. Least bitterns are probably quite common but are very shy and are rarely seen.

5. Shorebirds, Gulls, Terns and Allied Species

The annual woodcock singing-ground survey was conducted on May 4 and 10 birds were heard. The average number of woodcock heard over the 22 year survey period has been 5.5. This route, located in southeastern Pope County, is part of the nation-wide survey organized by the Office of Migratory Bird Management.

Numerous shorebirds were also observed throughout the district at various times of the year. Lesser yellowlegs, killdeer and others responded to the drawdowns and partial drawdowns of the managed pools. Natural drawdowns due to the dry summer produced mudflats in areas flooded since the drought of the 1930's.

A pair of Wilson's phalaropes, unusual in the district, were spotted on May 11. A lone phalarope was seen on May 6. Both were in Stevens County.

Upland sandpipers were commonly seen all summer long in the thinner, weedier stands of Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) land. We have no quantified information, but it appears that upland sandpipers are substantially benefiting from the Conservation Reserve Program.

6. Raptors

Common breeding raptors in this area include red-tailed hawk, kestrel, northern harrier, and great-horned owl.

The unusually large number of snowy owl sightings reported for December in the 1987 Annual Narrative Report continued into 1988 with two sightings (probably the same bird) reported in February.

Two more apparent beneficiaries of the Conservation Reserve Program are northern harriers and short-eared owls. Harriers are common on our units but now they also frequently use CRP fields for hunting and probably nesting. Short eared owls are normally uncommon in our district but in 1988 they were frequently seen on CRP land.

7. Other Migratory Birds

Other apparent "winners" due to CRP, and the most obvious, were bobolinks. Bobolinks were extremely common on CRP land. Larger CRP fields often supported 25 or more singing males. Although bobolinks are common on WPA's, State WMA's, and a few other grassy areas, it is a treat to see these and other grassland associated birds using private land in this region of row crop agriculture.

8. Game Mammals

White-tailed deer harvest was up this year in Stevens County with 538 deer registered compared to 533 deer registered in 1987. According to the State Wildlife Manager, this is the second highest harvest recorded. Spring deer densities in west-central Minnesota were not available. Gross productivity was 1.32 fawns/doe.

Moose are occasionally seen in west-central Minnesota. Our nest dragging crew spotted a moose on Long Lake WPA, Stevens County, in June. In late December a moose stayed on our Walden unit in Pope County for several days.



Moose are occasionally seen in west-central Minnesota. This one was seen on Walden WPA, Pope County. 12/31/88 BLA 88-28

Furbearer populations have changed dramatically due to the drought conditions this summer. Although fox populations are on the increase, mink, muskrat, and raccoon populations are showing a decline. The Area State Wildlife Manager reported a case of a muskrat and mink trapper who trapped 1500 rats and 100 mink in 1987 and only caught 100 rats and 20 mink in 1988.

Coyotes again have been seen in many areas of Pope, Lac Qui Parle, and Swift counties as they expand their range in west-central Minnesota. The coyote is unprotected by state law. Our Scent Post Survey (see Section D.5) did not show evidence of coyotes, but area trappers and residents have regularly seen them.

10. Other Resident Wildlife

According to the Minnesota DNR, the August roadside survey showed a decline of 43 percent in pheasant populations in west-central Minnesota and a 29 percent decline in populations statewide. The Area State Wildlife Manager stated that summer drought conditions may have played a major role in reducing the pheasant population.

The Gray Hungarian partridge roadside survey showed 20 birds per 100 miles, a 27 percent increase over 1987 populations.

11. Fisheries

In 1988, as in the past four years, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Area Fisheries Office in Glenwood has used three type V wetlands on WPA's for the rearing of walleye fingerlings. Production this year was variable due to lack of winter kill, high temperatures and low precipitation. These fingerlings have been stocked in fishing lakes.

MINNESOTA DNR FISHERIES STOCKING PROGRAM MORRIS WMD - 1988

<u>County</u>	<u>WPA</u>	<u>No. of Fingerlings</u>	<u>Pounds</u>
Pope	Bangor	0	0
	Rolling Forks	141	130
	Stammer	77	7

15. Animal Control

Predators

A predator control program was implemented on a three-year trial basis to increase waterfowl production. Sixteen waterfowl production areas covering 4,539 acres, approximately 10 percent of the district, were involved. The waterfowl production areas were selected for their potential for waterfowl production and centralized location to prevent long driving times. Three professional trappers were hired from the local area to increase fox trapping success through their experience and knowledge of local conditions. Operational costs including vehicles, wages, trapping equipment and supplies totaled \$34,000.

Trapping commenced on March 20 and concluded on July 15, 1988, racking up 27,252 trap nights (1 trap per night=1 trap night). All traps were inspected daily. Control methods included live traps, padded leghold traps, 110 conibear traps for Franklin's ground squirrels, incidental shooting, and digging out den sites. Target species were dispatched using lethal injection of T-61 euthanasia solution, cervical dislocation, or shooting. All non-target species were released when possible. All dead animals were buried in designated pits on select waterfowl production areas. Trapping data were collected daily and weekly reports were submitted to local and Federal officials.



Prior to trapping, all traps were cleaned, repaired, and prepared for the season. 3/18/88 BLA 88-29



Trappers injected predators with euthanasia solution (T-61).
5/88 GJL 88-30

The results show concentrations of predators on available cover. See Section D.5 for a comparison of nest success to predator control.

TRAPPING RESULTS - 1988

MORRIS WETLAND MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

<u>Control Method</u>	<u>Skunk</u>	<u>Fox</u>	<u>Raccoon</u>	<u>FGS¹</u>	<u>Mink</u>	<u>Badger</u>	<u>Trap Nights</u>
Livetrap	122	16	138	73	1 ²	1 ²	18,491
Leghold	22	137	20	8	3 ²	1 ²	6,332
Conibear	9	0	0	38	0	0	2,429
Shot	0	6	0	12	0	0	
Digging	0	0*	0	0	0	0	
Total	153	159	158	131	4	2	27,252

¹Franklin's Ground Squirrel

²Animals were released unharmed

*Two den sites were unsuccessfully excavated



Kevin Mixon collecting salad for lunch. 7/88 SJD 88-31

In past years beaver have challenged our views of water management. In 1988 mother nature settled the dispute--no water! With the drought conditions this summer, nuisance beaver were at an all time low. One beaver was removed at a cost of \$35.00. The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources removed one beaver dam with explosives on the Little Chippewa River Waterfowl Production Area, Pope County, to resolve a complaint from a neighbor.

H. PUBLIC USE

1. General

There are seven counties with a total of 3,971,155 acres in the Morris Wetland Management District. How do you adequately inform and encourage people in an area of this size to use the facilities and opportunities we offer on waterfowl production areas? How do we know what takes place on 230 individual refuges each with unique problems? This is the challenge we face.

We focus our efforts on trying to increase awareness of the value of wetlands, both public and private. Our progress is slower than we would like but we believe we are helping to improve the attitudes of many district residents toward wetlands and wildlife.

4. Interpretive Foot Trails

There are two interpretive foot trails in the Morris Wetland Management District. Both trails are self guided and are approximately one mile long. One trail is located on the Red-head Marsh WPA (Big Stone County) and derives much of its use from the community of Ortonville. The other trail is located on the Froland WPA (Pope County) and serves the communities of Benson, Starbuck and Glenwood. Unfortunately, our work load prevents us from doing more than basic trail maintenance. Although both local residents and tourists use the trails, we do not know the amount of use each trail receives.

The interpretive signs on Froland WPA were removed in late fall because missing and damaged signs left the interpretation confusing and incomplete. We plan to re-establish interpretive stops on the trail soon.



This "Duck's Dining Room" interpretive sign proved to be more of a raptor dining room. 7/88 SJD 88-32

6. Interpretive Exhibits/Demonstrations

During 1988, we developed a preliminary plan for using our headquarters site, Long Lake-Edwards WPA, as a demonstration area for waterfowl management techniques. The demonstration area will be used to display various management techniques to Federal and State government employees and private citizens. Our demonstration plans include water level management, wetland restoration, native grass seedings, artificial nest structures, predator exclusion fences, and other techniques.

Most of the implementation work is planned for 1989. We began work on an electric predator exclusion fence in November. In December we took advantage of mild weather to place a round hay bale in the wetland just below our office to demonstrate an inexpensive over-water nesting platform.



The hay bale demonstrates an inexpensive method of providing a nesting platform. 12/13/88 BLA 88-33

The "System 70" display, using various subject panels, is exhibited in banks, libraries and schools in the district. When the display is not in the field we use it at the headquarters.

Our permanent headquarters display consists of a series of panels that depict the purpose and work of the wetland management program with photographs, maps, and narrative.

7. Other Interpretive Programs

Soil Conservationist Angus helped organize a local "Weekend With Wildlife" festival held on June 10, 11 and 12. Part of the program was held at our office including star gazing in a planetarium and a presentation on timber wolves. Over 75 people attended these two events.

Several programs were presented to area youth groups by the Morris staff during 1988. Some of the subjects were: Waterfowl Management, Endangered Species, Prescribed Burning, and Tours of Waterfowl Production Areas.

Leaflet distribution boxes were placed on 15 waterfowl production areas. A total of 186 general information brochures were distributed.

Station films were provided to schools and other groups as requested. Seven news releases were given to local papers.

We did not hold an Open House in 1988 due to the massive Farm Bill-related work load. We plan to offer our Open House again in 1989. In the past our Open Houses have been very well received.

8. Hunting

Waterfowl hunting was rated as good in the Morris district where hunters found water. Finding water was the key. Many hunters were disappointed when they arrived on opening day at their traditional hunting marsh only to find it completely dry. Scaup hunting was reported to be excellent in late October.

Waterfowl hunting pressure was light in 1988. Many waterfowl hunters felt it was inappropriate to hunt ducks considering the low population and drought conditions. Others probably felt that the shorter season and lower bag limits made hunting less desirable.

Pheasant hunting may be considered average these days but when compared to 20-30 years ago, it's down-right poor. Apparently the drought, possibly combined with CRP haying, led to a very poor 1988 reproductive season and a reduced population. Still, persistent hunters using dogs enjoyed good success. There is considerable hope for this bird, however. The tremendous base of restored habitat in the Conservation Reserve Program combined with decent weather gives hope of higher populations.

Deer hunting in the Morris area was very good in 1988. Statewide, deer hunting has been excellent throughout the late 1980's. Our waterfowl production areas are heavily used for deer hunting and hunters on WPA's are quite successful.

The diversity of the waterfowl production areas in the Morris district offers much to the hunter. Some areas are excellent for fox hunting, some for gray and fox squirrels, some for cottontails or jackrabbits. Snipe, rail and woodcock populations are spotty, but offer good shooting on a few of our areas. Even ruffed grouse in huntable populations are known to exist on at least three waterfowl production areas. Gray (Hungarian) partridge are abundant, but tough to hunt over most of the district. All in all, the Morris District offers good to excellent hunting for most game species if the hunter is just willing to become knowledgeable about the critters and their coverts.

9. Fishing

Minnesota, "Land of 10,000 Lakes," is known for its fishing. Walleye, northern pike, bass, bluegill, crappie and catfish abound in many of the area lakes and streams, but only three of our waterfowl production areas receive any fishing pressure. Two units adjoin Artichoke Lake (Big Stone and Swift Counties), and the Chippewa River flows through our Heidebrink unit (Pope County).

10. Trapping

Trapping mink, muskrat, fox and raccoon affords many hours of pleasure and significant profit to local children, sportsmen, and professional trappers throughout the district. Populations of species associated with water such as muskrat and mink have declined dramatically in the last two years, greatly reducing trapping opportunities. The fox population remains high and many trappers are enjoying the challenge of fox trapping.

Since our waterfowl production areas are scattered over a seven county area, we are unable to obtain accurate data on the number of trappers or the amount of fur harvested.

11. Wildlife Observation

As waterfowl production areas are developed and become more and more established in the community, the local residents become aware of the opportunities they offer. Probably the most important aspect is the casual wildlife observation of people "just driving by." Waterfowl, deer, pheasants, and a myriad of other wildlife are there.

Many bird watchers take advantage of the waterfowl production areas. Because of the lack of good habitat in the surrounding areas, migratory and resident birds tend to concentrate on the units, much to the joy of the birders.

12. Other Wildlife Oriented Recreation

Hiking, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, photography, and mushroom hunting are just a few of the other wildlife oriented recreational opportunities offered on waterfowl production areas. Since no motorized vehicles are allowed on our units, many individuals find that simple peace and quiet is the most beneficial aspect of a visit to a waterfowl production area.

17. Law Enforcement

Three people on the Morris staff have law enforcement authority. Most enforcement activities are associated with easement violations or resolving waterfowl production area problems. As directed by program advise, enforcement during hunting seasons by the Morris staff is de-emphasized. Primary responsibility is left with the State Conservation Officers. We maintain good rapport with the state officers and work cooperatively with them when we can.

The following cases were made during fall hunting season. Violations were processed through state court.

<u>Offense</u>	<u>Disposition</u>
Construction of permanent bow stand	State warning citation.
Unplugged gun - 2 cases	Forfeit \$60.00 each.

I. EQUIPMENT AND FACILITIES

1. New Construction

Long Lake-Edwards Ducks Unlimited Project

Ducks Unlimited completed the design work for this project in late 1987. The Environmental Assessment was also submitted for review and approval in 1987. Early in 1988 we applied for State and Corps of Engineer permits for this project. The last permit was received on May 18. Bids were opened on June 23 and work started on June 30 by Commerford Construction.



Contractor constructing island in Pool H. 8/3/88 BLA 88-34

The cost of this project was approximately \$230,000 and consisted of six water control structures, two nesting islands, cleanout of 3,400 feet of channel, and one large ditch plug. By November the project was completed. We now have the ability to manage water levels on the eight major basins at our headquarters site. Working with Ducks Unlimited is a pure pleasure. The speed and lack of red tape to accomplish a large project was a delight.



Structure I. The lowest structure on the watershed and lack of emergency spillway site, resulted in a structure with 50 feet width of effective boards for spillway and water level control.
10/2/88 BLA 88-35



Contractor setting one of two full round risers that make up Structure H. 7/20/88 BLA 88-36

ARMS

The end at last!! A contract that was let in September 1985 was delayed many times due to high water and foot dragging by the contractor. Thanks to John Mullins of CGS in the Regional Office, this contract was finished and we did not lose the funds. Mr. Mullins put enough pressure on the contractor, "Contracting Services Independent" of St. Cloud, that they hired a sub-contractor to perform the work. This contract consisted of work at three sites:

1. Walden WPA, Pope County
Construction of a 1,400 foot dike with stop log structure created a new pool.
2. Moen WPA, Pope County
A 700 foot channel clean out and installation of a stop log structure gives us water control over what was a type V marsh.
3. Loen WPA, Swift County
A 535 foot dike on the west side, a 548 foot dike on the south side, 650 feet of new ditch, and a stop log structure restored a drained marsh.



Contractor installing stop log structure on Moen WPA, Pope County. 6/2/88 BLA 88-37

Minor Projects**a. Stevens County Pheasants Forever**

The local chapter of Pheasants Forever paid to have wetlands restored at three different sites in Stevens County. The local club feels that wetlands are important winter cover. The work was done on the following units.

Wente WPA - 3 ditch plugs, 3 tile breaks

Mero WPA - 1 ditch plug, 1 tile break

Pepperton WPA - build 2 dikes to restore one wetland



Wetland restored by two short dikes on Pepperton WPA, Stevens County. Restoration paid for by Stevens County Pheasants Forever. 12/7/88 BLA 88-38

b. New Offices

We were informed that there would be an Extension Specialist added to the staff in 1989. Thus, to provide a work space for the new position, two offices were constructed in the unfinished area of the basement. AT&T and an electrician were needed to wire the telephones, plugs and lights. Stud walls, insulation, sheet rocking, drop ceiling, painting, and other finish work was done by a Seasonal Tractor Operator from Fergus Falls Wetland Management District and the two wage grade employees of this district. The project will be completed in early 1989.



Rodney Ahrndt and Victor Gades installing drop ceiling in new basement office space. 12/31/88 BLA 88-39

c. Predator Exclosure

A predator exclosure project located southeast of the office was started in November . The fence, when completed, will enclose 16.5 acres. A 2"x 2" horse fence six feet tall was used. The fence was buried one foot deep and extends five feet above ground level. We had 75 percent of the fence up when the first bad winter storm stopped construction. We will finish the fence and electric wires in early spring 1989 before nesting starts.



Temporary Biological Aids digging post holes and setting wood posts for predator exclosure. 11/1/88 FLA 88-40

d. Island Construction

After the contractor completed the Moen WPA water control structure, the station's maintenance man constructed two 1/10 acre nesting islands in the center of the basin. The basin was so dry that the entire job was done with the D-6 Cat.



Aerial view of two nesting islands constructed in August on Moen WPA, Pope County. 8/13/88 BLA 88-41

2. Rehabilitation

a. Building Site

All buildings on the Strubbe tract, Stevens County, were sold in early 1988. By May, all buildings had been moved off the site. We burned all scrap wood and straw left on the site. All building foundations were buried on site. Many days of work were expended by temporary labor and YCC crew hauling garbage and old junk out of the grove to a landfill. By June the entire area was cleaned up and seeded to grasses at an estimated cost of \$4,500.



Strubbe tract house before sale and cleanup.
1/8/87 JTH 88-42



Strubbe tract after cleanup. 6/17/88 BLA 88-43

b. **Well Sealing**

Five wells were sealed in accordance with Minnesota State Health Department regulations. Valnes Well Drilling completed the work at a cost of \$1,350.00. The wells were located on the following waterfowl production areas.

Big Stone County -	Johnson WPA - 1
	Piper WPA - 1
Stevens County -	Pepperton WPA - 2
	Mero WPA - 1

3. **Major Maintenance**

Nest Baskets

All repairs were made at the same time as the use survey this summer. There were 299 baskets out that were checked. Ten baskets could not be located due to large stands of tall cattail. These will be located and checked in the spring of 1989.

Parking Lots

All parking lots were repaired and mowed in September and early October before the start of waterfowl hunting season. Tractor Operator Gades spent 12 days mowing the 204 parking lots. The tractor was loaded and unloaded from the tiltbed truck 111 times before the job was completed.

Posting

Since boundary signs along roads are subject to a great deal of vandalism, we checked all boundary signs next to roads this summer. Over 500 boundary signs and over 400 posts were replaced.

Vehicles

There were no major repairs needed this past year. Many hours were spent on a multitude of minor repairs due to the extra wear and tear involved with the trapping program and Farm Bill work.

4. **Equipment Utilization and Replacement**

Scraper

One of the year's rewarding experiences was working with the Minnesota Waterfowl Association on a Challenge Grant project. At the start the Association had a fund drive to raise half the purchase price of a 5-yard scraper for this station. The drive went so well they were able to assist in the purchase of two scrapers, with the second going to the Litchfield Wetland District.



Motor Vehicle Operator Ahmndt with new scraper obtained by use of Challenge Grant program. 8/88 SJD 88-44

Survey Equipment

A new level, tripod and rod were purchased this year. Due to Farm Bill wetland restoration, we had two survey crews in the field daily through much of the year.

4 X 4 A.T.V.

An additional A.T.V. was purchased primarily due to the trapping program. With two A.T.V.'s being used for trapping from March through July, an additional machine was needed for weed control and controlled burning.

Dodge 1/2 Ton Pickup

A new 1/2 ton Dodge pickup was received in October to replace an over-age 1/2 ton Ford.

Traps

Over \$5,500 were spent on trapping supplies this year. Of this amount, \$4,800 were spent on live traps used for skunk and raccoon.

5. Communications Systems

There were no additions to the station's communications system this year. The only major repair was to the control head of the base station. A power surge resulting from a lightning strike nearby caused the damage. This is the second consecutive year for this type of damage.

6. Computer Systems

The Morris Wetland Management District has now entered the "computer age." We have two IBM P.C. Model 60 computer systems. One IBM system with a letter quality printer is for use by the station's Secretary. The other computer system has a pinwriter printer and modem and is used by the remainder of the station staff.

Each machine has been loaded according to Regional Office instructions. The following programs have been installed and are being used: Word Perfect (4.2 and 5.0 versions), RBase for Dos, Micro-soft Chart, Lotus 1-2-3, and Procom. The Word Perfect programs are used most frequently. Procom is used weekly. RBase has been used for several reports including personal property, accounting, land use plans, mailing lists, and several Maintenance Management System programs.

A limited amount of training has been received on these programs. Most training has been in the form of tutorials and trial-by-error. As can be imagined, working with new programs can be very frustrating. When this happens we are very thankful for the services of Deb Southworth in the Regional Office. She is always willing to take the time to walk us through any problem we encounter.

7. Energy Conservation

The staff continues to work with the Regional Office Engineering section for solutions to the heating problems that have existed in the office building from the day we moved into the building.

J. OTHER ITEMS

3. Items of Interest

REVENUE SHARING PAYMENTS - MORRIS WMD

<u>County</u>	<u>FY86</u>	<u>FY87</u>	<u>FY88</u>
Big Stone	\$23,354	\$13,369	\$
Lac Qui Parle	10,062	2,891	
Pope	32,929	16,234	
Stevens	31,960	15,617	
Swift	13,735	14,391	
Traverse	14,839	5,369	
Yellow Medicine	<u>356</u>	<u>100</u>	
Total	\$127,235	\$ 67,971	

Revenue sharing payments have been important to our acquisition program. The county commissioners are always interested in the percentage of the calculated annual payment their counties receive. The dramatic reduction in payments in FY87 is now causing the shut down of acquisition in several counties in Minnesota. Approximately 50 percent of full payment will be made for FY88. The Fish and Wildlife Service is working very hard to provide full payment. Checks of 100 percent payment certainly make acquisition presentations to County Boards of Commissioners more pleasant.

Krantz Lake Restoration

After many years of frustration Krantz Lake, located on the Krantz Lake WPA in Pope County, was finally restored in the fall of 1988. The lake was partially drained in the early 1900's. However, the lake remained a high quality waterfowl production and migration marsh until the drainage was illegally improved in the 1970's. The struggle between neighbors, local authorities, and the Minnesota DNR became very bitter. Fortunately the Service was able to assist in rectifying the problems when Dr. O. A. Eide, a private landowner who owned a large portion of the lake, donated 80 acres to the Service. At the same time the Sauk River Watershed District was given jurisdiction of the ditch systems affecting Krantz Lake and began coordinating a restoration effort with the Minnesota DNR, Fish and Wildlife Service, and other private landowners. Private funds were quickly collected and a 1,000 foot dike with a rip-rapped spillway was

completed in October. Once water conditions return to normal this 60 acre marsh should again provide prime waterfowl habitat.

Plans have been completed for improving an outlet from County Ditch #11 into Krantz Lake. Currently water is being diverted to the west and by-passes the lake. A \$5,500 project planned for FY89 will bring the majority of County Ditch #11 water into Krantz Lake. Hopefully the saga of the Krantz Lake problem will then finally be concluded.



Thanks Steve!!

6/27/88 BLA 88-45

The Fish and Wildlife Service Citizen's Award was presented to Mr. Steve Kufrin for his outstanding contributions in preserving and restoring waterfowl habitat. The award was presented by Mr. Rollin Siegfried, Minnesota Wetland Complex Supervisor, at a special ceremony held June 27th at the Morris Wetland Management District Office. Several conservation organization officials, Fish and Wildlife Service employees, Minnesota Department of Natural Resource employees, and friends of Mr. Kufrin attended the ceremony.

A certificate and a letter of commendation signed by the Fish and Wildlife Service Director, Frank Dunkle, were presented to Kufrin. Dunkle's letter mentioned several projects that Kufrin had assisted the Fish and Wildlife Service with during the past 11 years. The projects included assisting us in acquiring several land tracts that are now waterfowl production areas, aiding in the coordination of public equipment donations, and Ducks Unlimited projects. Steve is a nice guy to have on our side.

4. Credits

The following staff members contributed to this report.

Stettner:	I (6), all typing and assembly of report.
Angus:	F (1-12).
Bober:	E (2-3, 6), I (1-5,7-8), and J (1-2).
Anderson:	G (8-17).
Delehanty:	D, E (7), G (1-7), H (1-16), and editing.
Lewis:	F (13) and H (17-19).
Radtke:	A, B, C (1-2), E (1,5,8), J (3-4) and K.

C (3) - was written by Lewis, Anderson, Delehanty, and Radtke.



No time for a nap in 1988!

5/26/88

BLA

88-46

K. FEEDBACK

The Farm Bill era is here! It is hectic but rewarding and we intend to meet the challenges with enthusiasm. The spin-offs of this program are certainly the best tools for habitat preservation and restoration we have had available for some time so we hope to make the best of the opportunity.

New problems come up each year in the Service and we have a few "carry overs." However, I feel our supervisors are dealing with these issues to the best of their ability.

We have no major complaints and are looking forward to 1989.



Looking forward to the new year. 12/88 BLA 88-47

"On a drive of 190 miles on the opening day, much of the way through the very heart of the lake region, not a single duck was seen in any of the sloughs or lakes or in the air! This is not much like old times! Even those who went from here to southern Canada reported only a fair shoot. There are too many hunters these day, places are too easy to access, the open seasons are perhaps too long or too frequent, and unwise and useless drainage operations have been too general and too extensive. Whatever the causes may be it is plain that something drastic must be done in the near future, both north and south, if our wild-fowl are to be saved."

This observation made by an employee of the Morris Wetland Management District during a 1988 fall trip? No!! Actually this quote comes from the Logbook of Minnesota Bird Life, 1917-37, by Thomas S. Roberts, M.D. and he is referring to a trip he made in the fall of 1928. Are our current actions drastic enough? Time will tell.

One For Swampbuster

NWF Appeal Successful

Is the farmer's longtime friend, the Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service (ASCS), willing to get tough when it comes to carrying out so-called "Swampbuster" provisions of the Food Security Act of 1985? It appears so, given ASCS Administrator Milton Hertz's recent decision to overturn a Minnesota State Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Committee opinion granting a Swampbuster exemption to a local watershed district.

The decision, besides being a stiff warning to local and state ASCS offices to pay attention to the law, which denies agricultural subsidies to farmers who convert wetlands to cropland, sets a precedent for conservation groups wanting to appeal such illegal exemptions.

One of the program's biggest administrative woes has been the lack of an appeals procedure outside of civil lawsuits for citizen groups challenging Swampbuster determinations. "Until now, there has been no administrative method of challenging erroneous local decisions," said National Wildlife Federation attorney Anthony Turrini who, with the help of others at NWF's Prairie Wetlands Resource Center in Bismarck, N.D., filed the successful appeal with Hertz. "Hopefully this will encourage other environmental groups and concerned citizens to follow suit and bring their own informal appeals."

In this particular case, the Minnesota State ASCS Committee in May 1987 granted an exemption to Swampbuster provisions for a 100-acre wetlands drainage project in the Yellow Medicine River Watershed District. Earlier the local ASCS Committee, finding that the project in western Minnesota had not commenced before Swampbuster's Dec. 23, 1985 cutoff date, had denied the request for an exemption.

Following the state ASCS Committee's decision, NWF filed an informal appeal to Hertz with the help of several concerned parties including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. The Federation argued that the project had none of the prerequisites that would allow it to qualify for an exemption. For instance, the preliminary engineering plan for the project was not completed until after Dec. 23, 1985, which meant the project's drainage plan could not have been officially adopted before Swampbuster was enacted.

Administrator Hertz, in a Aug. 16 letter to NWF announcing his decision, said that the final engineering report for the proposed drainage was not finished until August 1987. He added that the funds spent before Dec. 23, 1985 were for a bond and not a contract for draining, dredging,

filling, leveling or otherwise altering the wetlands.

The latter is required to qualify for an exemption under Swampbuster.

Since Hertz announced his decision, project proponents have filed an appeal seeking to overturn his ruling. The matter may eventually end up in court depending on the outcome of the next administrative decision. Nonetheless, says Turrini, Hertz's recent opinion supporting NWF's appeal is a clear sign that ASCS in Washington, D.C., is willing to give conservationists, not just farmers, a fair hearing.—Dennis A. Johnson

CURRENT STATUS:

To date Mr. Hertz's decision has been upheld. The drainage system is now installed and the wetlands are listed as converted.

Proponents said they would not place fill in wetlands during project installation to avoid Corps of Engineer's permit requirements and authority. However, they did! Now the Corps of Engineers has requested restoration of the six best wetlands drained by the project and will probably achieve it only through litigation.



An exemption under 'Swampbuster' restrictions for this wetlands drainage project in western Minnesota has been denied following an appeal by NWF. The decision sets a national precedent and may help open the way for others to contest other projects illegally exempted from Swampbuster.