

REVIEW AND APPROVALS

MORRIS WETLAND MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

Morris, Minnesota

ANNUAL NARRATIVE REPORT

Calendar Year 1995



AR Poff  
Wetland Manager

5/3/96  
Date

Ralph Sigurd  
Complex Manager Review

7 May 96  
Date

Nita M. Zuber  
ARD, Refuges & Wildlife Approval

5/13/96  
Date

## INTRODUCTION

The Morris Wetland Management District (WMD), originally established in 1964 as the Benson WMD, includes 241 Waterfowl Production Areas (WPA's) totalling 48,442 acres in fee title ownership. The Morris office also administers approximately 19,400 wetland acres of Waterfowl Management Easement lands, 1,200 acres of FmHA Easements and 827 acres of Wildlife Habitat Protection Easements. 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 Waterfowl and Wetlands Management Complex (MWMMC), 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, canvasback, and Canada geese. 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, especially neotropical birds, and to provide for bio-diversity. Private land habitat improvement for waterfowl and other wildlife is an added emphasis during the 1990's. Waterfowl Production Areas are open to public hunting and a variety of other wildlife oriented uses. The WPA's receive their highest public use on opening days of waterfowl, pheasant, and deer hunting seasons.

Of the 48,442 acres of fee title, 16,692 acres consist of marshes. Grasslands comprise 29,619 acres of the District. This category includes 7,905 acres of reseeded native grasses and 6,404 acres of unbroken native prairie. The balance of the existing grassland contains various cover types including brome, quack and alfalfa. Croplands account for an approximately 700 acres and consist primarily of rest-rotation food plots for resident game.

## INTRODUCTION

### TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
A. <u>HIGHLIGHTS</u>	1
B. <u>CLIMATIC CONDITIONS</u>	2
C. <u>LAND ACQUISITION</u>	
1. Fee Title. . . . .	6
2. Easements. . . . .	8
3. Other. . . . .	11
4. Farmers Home Administration Conservation Easements . . .	12
D. <u>PLANNING</u>	
1. Master Plan. . . . .	13
2. Management Plan. . . . .	Nothing to Report
3. Public Participation . . . . .	Nothing to Report
4. Compliance with Environmental Mandates . . . . .	13
5. Research and Investigations. . . . .	13
6. Other. . . . .	Nothing to Report
E. <u>ADMINISTRATION</u>	
1. Personnel. . . . .	20
2. Youth Programs . . . . .	21
3. Other Manpower Programs. . . . .	21
4. Volunteer Program. . . . .	22
5. Funding. . . . .	23
6. Safety . . . . .	23
7. Technical Assistance . . . . .	24
8. Other. . . . .	Nothing to Report

## F. HABITAT MANAGEMENT

	<u>Page</u>
1. General. . . . .	27
2. Wetlands . . . . .	27
3. Forests. . . . .	28
4. Croplands. . . . .	28
5. Grasslands . . . . .	29
6. Other Habitats . . . . .	Nothing to Report
7. Grazing. . . . .	31
8. Haying . . . . .	32
9. Fire Management. . . . .	33
10. Pest Control . . . . .	34
11. Water Rights . . . . .	Nothing to Report
12. Wilderness and Special Areas . . . . .	Nothing to Report
13. WPA/Easement Monitoring. . . . .	35
15. Private Lands. . . . .	36

## G. WILDLIFE

1. Wildlife Diversity . . . . .	45
2. Endangered and/or Threatened Species . . . . .	45
3. Waterfowl. . . . .	46
4. Marsh and Water Birds. . . . .	53
5. Shorebirds, Gulls, Terns and Allied Species. . . . .	53
6. Raptors. . . . .	54
7. Other Migratory Birds. . . . .	54
8. Game Mammals . . . . .	55
9. Marine Mammals . . . . .	Nothing to Report
10. Other Resident Wildlife. . . . .	57
11. Fisheries. . . . .	57
12. Wildlife Propagation and Stocking. . . . .	Nothing to Report
13. Surplus Animal Disposal. . . . .	Nothing to Report
14. Scientific Collections . . . . .	Nothing to Report
15. Animal Control . . . . .	58
16. Marking and Banding. . . . .	Nothing to Report
17. Disease Prevention and Control . . . . .	58



#### H. PUBLIC USE

	<u>Page</u>
1. General. . . . .	59
2. Outdoor Classrooms - Students. . . . .	59
3. Outdoor Classrooms - Teachers. . . . .	Nothing to Report
4. Interpretive Foot Trails . . . . .	60
5. Interpretive Tour Routes . . . . .	61
6. Interpretive Exhibits/Demonstrations . . . . .	61
7. Other Interpretive Programs. . . . .	63
8. Hunting. . . . .	64
9. Fishing. . . . .	66
10. Trapping . . . . .	66
11. Wildlife Observation . . . . .	66
12. Other Wildlife Oriented Recreation . . . . .	66
13. Camping. . . . .	Nothing to Report
14. Picnicking . . . . .	Nothing to Report
15. Off-Road Vehicling . . . . .	Nothing to Report
16. Other Non-Wildlife Oriented Recreation . . . . .	Nothing to Report
17. Law Enforcement. . . . .	66
18. Cooperating Associations . . . . .	Nothing to Report
19. Concessions. . . . .	Nothing to Report

#### I. EQUIPMENT AND FACILITIES

1. New Construction. . . . .	67
2. Rehabilitation. . . . .	68
3. Major Maintenance . . . . .	69
4. Equipment Utilization and Replacement . . . . .	69
5. Communications Systems. . . . .	69
6. Computer Systems. . . . .	69
7. Energy Conservation . . . . .	69
8. Other . . . . .	Nothing to Report

#### J. OTHER ITEMS

1. Cooperative Programs. . . . .	Nothing to Report
2. Other Economic Uses . . . . .	Nothing to Report
3. Items of Interest . . . . .	70
4. Credits . . . . .	71

#### K. FEEDBACK

## A. HIGHLIGHTS

- Total precipitation for the year was 9.44 inches above normal. (Section B)
- Easement acquisition remains more active than fee purchasing. (Section C.2)
- Hen house structure study results indicate high nest success rates. (Section D.5)
- Over 2,900 acres of habitat were manipulated by fire, haying and grazing. (Section F.7,8,9)
- Approximately \$55,000 of contributed funds were received from partners. (Section F.15)
- Bald eagles are reproducing in prairie country. (Section G.2)
- Artificial nesting structure testing and distribution to the public continues. (Section G.3)
- Wetland Field Day is a success again. (Section H.2)
- Demonstration trail development continues as observation deck is completed. (Section H.4)



Environmental Education - Key to the future!  
95-1 5/25/95 CGR



## B. CLIMATIC CONDITIONS



Above average precipitation made 1995 a challenging year.  
95-2 2/14/95 BLA

The weather of 1995 was characterized by high snowfall and above average precipitation in 9 of 12 months. January and February were lackluster months with average temperature and moisture conditions and no major snowstorms or extended periods of cold air. March had about triple its normal precipitation (3.77 inches versus 1.13 inches average) and double its normal snowfall (14.6 inches). April was cold with average temperatures 5.4° below normal, and was the first April since 1975 when the temperature never reached 60°. Although 1995 annual temperatures were above normal, the combination of cool temperatures in April and May and excessive moisture in March delayed spring planting.

January through April snowfall totaled 41.4 inches, well above the average of 26.1 inches with the greatest daily snowfall occurring on April 12 of 7.5 inches. May was cooler than normal with above average precipitation. Warm weather finally arrived in June with above average temperatures and well below average rainfall. There were six days in June when the temperature reached or exceeded 90°, the most since 14 days in June, 1988. There were only three days in July and one day in August when the temperature reached 90°. On July 4-5 we received a four inch rainfall for the third year in a row. This year we received 4.23 inches on July 4-5, last year 4.05 inches on July 5, and in 1993, 3.90 inches of precipitation fell on July 4. This July was the 7th wettest on record in Morris, with a total July rainfall of 6.74 inches. Total year-to-date precipitation through July was 4.49 inches above normal.



August was almost a carbon copy of July with 6.26 inches of precipitation and was the 7th wettest August on record. Small grain harvest was delayed and was extremely difficult due to wet field conditions. Low evening temperatures of 68° to 71° on August 7, 8, 12, 13, 17, and 18 provided for some of the warmest and muggiest evenings recorded at Morris. September was dry and mild until the last day of the month when we received 1.72 inches of precipitation with another 0.97 inches on October 1.



Above average precipitation caused problems for many.  
95-3 9/22/95 CGR

An early snowstorm on October 23-24 produced 5.2 inches of snow in Morris, and much more to the north and west of Morris, causing power outages due to wet snow and high winds. Some customers did not have power restored until the end of October. The combination of the late September rain and October snowstorm delayed and pushed harvest into November. Drier conditions in November prevailed and crop harvest and some fall tillage were completed. December had 13.5 inches of snow, November 4.7, and October 6.5, bringing the 1995 snowfall total to 66.1 inches, 27.7 inches above normal. Total precipitation for the year was 33.44 inches, 9.66 inches above normal and the 4th wettest year recorded at Morris. In 1993 we received 32.81 inches of precipitation. The wettest recorded year was 1984 with 34.10 inches of precipitation.

## RECORDS OR NEAR RECORDS SET IN 1995

<u>Period</u>	<u>Observation</u>	<u>Record</u>
March 8	Daily min temp (-18°)	Record min temp
March 27	Daily precip (.93 in)	Record daily precip
March	Monthly prec (3.77 in)	2nd highest precip
April 5	Daily min temp (8°)	Record daily min temp
April 12	Daily snowfall (7.5 in)	Record daily snowfall
April 12	Daily precip (1.20 in)	Record daily precip
April	Failure to reach 60°	First time since 1975
July 5	Daily precip (3.05 in)	2nd highest daily prec
August 3 and 12	Highest min temp (68°)	Record high daily min
August 13	Highest min temp (70°)	Record high daily min
Aug. 7, 8, 17, 18, 30	Highest min temps	4th, 2nd, 5th, 4th, 3rd highest minimum
September 20	Daily min temp (31°)	3rd lowest daily temp
September 22	Daily min temp (26°)	4th lowest daily temp
September 22	First gen killing frost	Median date is Oct 4
September 29	Highest min temp (60°)	Tied record highest min
September 30	Highest min temp (59°)	Record highest daily minimum
October 1	Daily precip (0.97 in)	3rd highest daily prec
October 12	Daily max temp (85°)	Record daily max temp
October 24	Daily snowfall (5.2 in)	Record daily snowfall
November 3	Lowest max temp (25°)	3rd lowest daily max
November 4	Lowest max temp (20°)	2nd lowest daily max
November 5	Lowest min temp (10°)	3rd lowest daily min
December 1	Daily max temp (56°)	Record daily max temp
December 8	Daily snowfall (6.0 in)	Tied record daily snowfall (1924)

## COMPARATIVE WEATHER DATA - 1995

<u>Period</u>	<u>Mean Temperature</u>			<u>Total Precip.</u>			<u>Snowfall</u>		
	1995	1994	Aver.	1995	1994	Aver.	1995	1994	Aver.
Jan.	12.1	-2.5	8.0	.91	1.00	.68	9.5	16.0	7.8
Feb.	14.4	5.1	12.8	.55	.71	.67	8.1	12.9	6.9
Mar.	28.7	29.5	26.7	3.77	.78	1.13	14.6	2.4	8.0
April	38.2	43.9	43.6	2.50	5.57	2.26	9.2	9.5	3.4
May	54.8	60.2	56.1	3.10	1.12	2.97	0	0	0.2
June	70.5	67.9	65.8	2.10	2.50	3.96	0	0	0
July	69.8	68.1	70.9	6.74	6.16	3.51	0	0	0
August	71.4	66.2	68.7	6.26	2.16	3.01	0	0	0
Sept.	58.6	62.6	59.0	2.68	1.98	2.20	0	0	0.1
Oct.	44.7	49.3	47.2	3.35	3.13	1.74	6.5	0	0.7
Nov.	23.2	34.6	29.7	.44	.73	.97	4.7	8.5	4.7
Dec.	15.4	19.4	15.2	1.04	.41	.68	13.5	5.8	6.6
Annual	41.8	42.0	42.0	33.44	26.25	23.78	66.1	55.1	38.4



## SELECTED WEATHER VARIABLES

<u>Weather</u>	<u>1995</u>	<u>1994</u>	<u>Mean</u>
Growing season precip. (April 1 - August 31)	20.70 in.	17.51 in.	15.71 in.
Maximum temperature	94° (June 17,18)	94° (June 15)	
Minimum temperature	-18° (March 8)	-33° (Feb. 9)	
Days with temp. <90°F	10 day	1 day	13 days
Days with temp. >0°F	33 days	51 days	47 days
Last spring frost	31° (April 27)	31° (May 5)	32° (May 11)
First fall frost	31° (Sept. 20)	28° (Oct. 25)	32° (Sept. 25)
Corn growing degree days (May - September)	2456	2404	2300



Soil from this field went directly into a wetland.  
95-4 5/95 DDH



### C. LAND ACQUISITION

#### 1. Fee Title

Two new fee tracts totaling 132.64 acres were added to the Morris Wetland Management District in 1995. This compares to four acres in 1994. One of the tracts was a new start and the other a roundout to an existing waterfowl production area. The Glacial Lake State Park and Artichoke access trade subtracted 278.58 acres from the District's total. Therefore, the current fee acreage of 48,441.96 represents 65 percent of the Morris District's goal acres.

#### WATERFOWL PRODUCTION AREA ACREAGE - MORRIS WMD - 1995

<u>County</u>	<u>Acquisition</u>		<u>Acquisition</u>		<u>Goal</u>
	<u>Total 12/31/94</u>		<u>Total 12/31/95</u>		<u>Acres</u>
	<u>Units</u>	<u>Acres</u>	<u>Units</u>	<u>Acres</u>	<u>Acres</u>
Big Stone	61	10,630.14	61	10,617.89	15,600
Lac qui Parle	16	3,372.85	17	3,405.49	6,600
Pope	63	13,402.58	63	13,136.25	21,000
Stevens	54	8,995.82	54	8,995.82	12,850
Swift	30	7,579.03	30	7,579.03	10,800
Traverse	12	3,963.63	12	4,063.63	6,720
Yellow Medicine	4	643.85	4	643.85	1,260
<b>Total</b>	<b>240</b>	<b>48,587.90</b>	<b>241</b>	<b>48,441.96</b>	<b>74,830</b>

The total fee acres acquired in 1995 is again one of the lowest since the acquisition program began in the early 1960's. Although willing seller numbers increased slightly, the continuing low annual revenue sharing payments make it difficult to obtain county certification and thereby discourages the Wetland Manager from being aggressive in going after fee areas. More emphasis on wetland habitat protection easements also reduced the time available for realtors to work on fee tracts. The fee program is slow and probably will remain that way.

The long term future of fee acquisition continues to be an unknown. The farm economy, revenue sharing, Service staff time, acquisition funding, Land Exchange Board attitude, emphasis on easement work, and many other factors will influence its future. However, one thing is certain, sufficient wetland habitat still exists for the Morris District to reach its fee acquisition goals.

The tax loss issue continues to be the Service's greatest hurdle to future acquisitions. A trust fund payment is made to the County government with each new fee purchase where revenue sharing is short. The interest from the trust fund payment, when invested at the current one-year treasury bill rate, should make up the difference between the revenue sharing payments and the taxes that would be paid on land if it remained private property.

The payments will only be made in cases where the estimated revenue sharing payment for the land is less than the current taxes on the property. It is up to the counties to decide what to do with the payments. Previously purchased lands are not covered by this new plan. The County Commissioners appreciate this change in the Service's program but don't consider it the answer to the revenue sharing problem and all our "back taxes."

A county by county analysis of current and future acquisition follows:

#### **Big Stone County**

The Fish and Wildlife Service currently owns approximately 10,618 fee acres in Big Stone County, not including Big Stone National Wildlife Refuge. This represents 68 percent of the 15,600 acre goal. No fee tracts were purchased in Big Stone County in 1995.

Land acquisition is not an easy task in Big Stone County at the present time. Tax loss seems to be a major issue with the County Commissioners and Zoning Commission. They are also uncomfortable with the fee acres purchased because of the loss of farmable land. However, the Service has always been successful in Big Stone County. The only way to test the Commissioner's attitude is to take a tract before them and see what happens.

Wildlife habitat protection easements and wetland easements are being certified by the Zoning Commission and County Commissioners without a great deal of difficulty. It seems these officials accept easements as being a better option than fee acquisition and an answer to the revenue sharing problem. Eight new easements were certified in 1995, including one of the new Habitat Protection (grassland) Easements.

#### **Lac qui Parle County**

One of the fee tracts purchased in the Morris District in 1995 was the 32.64 acre Plover WPA. The County Commissioners had no opposition to this small purchase. They would rather not see the Service continue to purchase land but we probably can push tracts through if the tax issue is solved. One wetland easement was certified in 1995. The Commissioners have no problem in certifying our easements.

#### **Pope County**

No fee tracts were purchased in Pope County in 1995. Fee purchases are not popular with the Board and it would be difficult to get certification. The Pope County Commissioners require us to go to the Township Boards for their opinion. The Commissioners use this method to slow our efforts and to reduce their responsibility. Our easement program is very active in Pope County and has received only minor opposition from the Commissioners. Nine easements were purchased in 1995.

#### **Stevens County**

No fee and only one easement was purchased in 1995 because of lack of landowner interest.

**Swift County**

No fee tracts were purchased in 1995. Two grassland easements were taken. Getting certification from the Swift County Zoning Commission and the Commissioners will always be a challenge but the Service has an excellent record of success. Revenue Sharing is the major obstacle of fee purchases in Swift County also.

**Traverse County**

The 100 acre Sykora fee tract was purchased as a roundout to the Mosquito Ranch WPA. County Commissioner certification was obtained after a long and heated discussion. All in a days work when you go to Traverse County.

Three easements were taken and certified without any problems.

**Yellow Medicine County**

No fee tracts were taken in 1995. One easement (Kontz) was certified by the Commissioners after we met with neighbors, county officials, and the owner to clarify a township road problem.

2. Easements

Approximately 724 wetland acres were added by the 27 Wetland Easements and Wildlife Habitat Protection (grassland) Easements. The Grassland Easement is a new type added in 1993 and will be explained in detail later in this section.

**EASEMENT PROGRAM STATUS - MORRIS WMD - 1995**

<u>County</u>	<u>Easements</u>	<u>Wetland Acres</u>	<u>Total Easement Acres</u>	<u>Total Goal Acres</u>
Big Stone	185	6,469	23,483.71	42,640
Lac qui Parle	26	927	2,891.03	23,540
Pope	212	8,032	30,572.96	44,180
Stevens	51	1,648	4,418.28	6,090
Swift	53	1,134	4,101.52	14,540
Traverse	33	1,081	3,696.96	8,440
Yellow Medicine	<u>7</u>	<u>149</u>	<u>527.27</u>	<u>7,860</u>
<b>Total 1995</b>	<b>567</b>	<b>19,440</b>	<b>69,691.73</b>	<b>147,290</b>
<b>Total 1994</b>	<b>540</b>	<b>18,716</b>	<b>66,930.81</b>	<b>147,290</b>
<b>Total 1993</b>	<b>506</b>	<b>17,984</b>	<b>64,049.78</b>	<b>147,290</b>
<b>Total 1992</b>	<b>475</b>	<b>16,986</b>	<b>60,307.59</b>	<b>162,290</b>
<b>Total 1991</b>	<b>455</b>	<b>16,096</b>	<b>57,908.18</b>	<b>162,290</b>

**Wetland Easement**

Wetland easements consisted of 22 tracts out of a total of 27 easements taken in 1995. 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 water-fowl production area. However, wetlands located near Minnesota Department of Natural Resource's Wildlife Management Areas or other acceptable nesting cover can also be protected by easement. A large portion of the wetland easements currently being purchased are on restored wetlands. This probably will be the trend as long as the private lands program remains active.

The future of the easement program continues to be directly related to funds and manpower available to our Division of Realty. The number of easements purchased was high again in 1995 as Realty personnel contacted the landowners who permitted wetland restoration on Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) lands or other private tracts. If manpower was available for additional "door knocking," many other easements could be taken.

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

The county boards of commissioners must review all easement proposals for certification as with fee tracts. Easement certification has usually been routine in the past. However, opposition is increasing and some problems occurred in 1995. The major objection is placing easements on restored wetlands that were previously considered cropland. Many Commissioners view that as a loss of productive agricultural land and are concerned that the conversion to marsh will reduce the tax revenue. All of the objections were handled at the field and none were elevated to the Land Exchange Board level.

**Wildlife Habitat Protection Easements**

The Fish and Wildlife Service introduced the new Wildlife Habitat Protection Easement in 1993. This easement is primarily aimed at preserving native tallgrass prairie. However, it can be used for other upland sites to enhance production habitat.

Four types of the easement are available with some grazing and/or haying options; otherwise the easement is very restrictive and allows virtually no uses except walking, hunting and trapping. The landowner is required to pay taxes and control the noxious weeds. The easement is perpetual with a one-time payment to the landowner.



The Habitat Protection Easement is being used to protect native prairie tracts, but.... 95-5 9/26/95 BLA



.....we need to hurry! First the rocks are removed and then comes the plow. 95-6 11/20/95 BLA

## EASEMENTS FOR WILDLIFE HABITAT PROTECTION - 1995

<u>County</u>	<u>Easements</u>	<u>HO</u>	<u>GO</u>	<u>HG</u>	<u>NHG</u>	<u>Acres</u>
Big Stone	1				1	70.49
Lac qui Parle	0				0	0.00
Pope	2				2	63.16
Stevens	0					0.00
Swift	2				2	93.00
Traverse	0					0.00
Yellow Medicine	<u>0</u>	<u>—</u>	<u>—</u>	<u>—</u>	<u>—</u>	<u>0.00</u>
<b>1995 Totals</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>226.65</b>
<b>1994 Totals</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>600.44</b>
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>827.09</b>

HG - Allow haying and grazing  
 HO - Allow haying only  
 GO - Allow grazing only  
 NHG - No haying or grazing allowed

Approximately 20 private tracts were field checked by Morris WMD personnel in 1995. Ten of these tracts were referred to realty for landowner contacts. Several offers are still pending but five owners have agreed to easements and the transactions were completed before the end of 1995.

The new Habitat Protection Easements must have County Commissioner approval and Land Exchange Board certification in the same manner as the Wetland Easement. This new easement also counts against the goal acreage set for each Minnesota county.

The preservation of native prairie is the primary objective of the grassland easement work in the Morris District. Less than one percent of the original 18 million acres of native prairie in Minnesota remains unbroken. Some of the tracts accepted are being enhanced or "squared up" by seeding local species of native grasses and forbs on cropland adjacent to the original prairie tracts. The Service is providing the seed and doing the seeding in these cases.

Wildlife Habitat Protection Easement agreements were taken in three counties in 1995. There was no major opposition from the neighbors or County Commissioners on the tracts that were processed in 1995. Some opposition is anticipated as the number of easement proposals increases, but, since the government will not have fee ownership, it may help the Service's effort to protect this unique habitat type.

### 3. Other

The Blue Mounds WPA-Glacial Lake State Park trade with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources was finally processed. An access to Artichoke Lake that is part of the Artichoke WPA,



Big Stone County, was also transferred as part of this agreement. The "park" trade had proceeded slowly, having been initiated in 1986. The trade allowed the Service to divest of land that was causing illegal park access problems. The Artichoke segment of the trade gives the Minnesota DNR control of an access to a public fishing lake. The State updated the current access which was in poor condition. In exchange for these tracts, the Service received some island acreage within the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge.

#### 4. Farmers Home Administration Conservation Easements

Wetland Manager Radtke evaluated four Farmers Home Administration (FmHA) tracts and submitted four deed restrictions in 1995. All four tracts were still pending at the end of this reporting period. Several tracts from previous years have now been processed and a total of 20 easement tracts are under permanent protection.

#### FmHA ACCOMPLISHMENTS - MORRIS WMD - 1995

<u>County</u>	<u>Farms Reviewed</u>	<u>Service Deed Restrictions</u>	<u>Wetland Plugs Completed</u>	<u>Service Total Easements In Place</u>	<u>Total Esmt. Acre</u>
Big Stone	0	0	0	1	4.82
Lac qui Parle	1	1	0	1	30.13
Pope	1	1	0	5	219.13
Stevens	0	0	0	1	73.55
Swift	1	1	0	9	490.61
Traverse	0	0	0	0	0.00
Yellow Medicine	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>342.68</u>
1995 Total	4	4	0	20	1160.92
1994 Total	4	4	2	16	1050.77
1993 Total	5	5	2	10	825.33
1992 Total	8	5	0	0	0
1991 Total	3	3	0	0	0

Only minimum management of FmHA tracts is currently conducted because of our funding shortage. Old cropland is usually seeded back to wildlife cover under an agreement with the new landowner. Wetland restoration has been done force account or under contract if funds are available. Most posting has been completed and is being kept current.

## D. PLANNING

### 1. Master Plan

Field inspections of property acquisitions are conducted following each new purchase. Current habitat conditions and physical features are documented along with all pertinent information. Next this and all supporting historical, topographical, biological, and geographical data is assembled and put on a resource inventory and planning card. Development needs with respect to habitat improvements, public use facilities, posting and repairs are also identified and summarized in a Land Use Development Plan for each tract. Plans are updated as changes occur.

Work continues on the backlog of updating and writing management and development plans for WPA's. Field checks were conducted, updates made, and plans submitted for review.

### 4. Compliance with Environmental Mandates

Compatibility Determination documentation have been written for existing management activities, recreational and hunting opportunities, Right-of-Way, Special Use Permits, easement program, water management plans, and development projects for the Morris Wetlands Management District. New documentation for food plots and Bti-Chironomid Field Dose-Response Study were written this year.

### 5. Research and Investigations

#### **Morris WMD NR95 - "Predator/Furbearer Scent Post Survey"**

The Scent Post Survey in Minnesota (20th annual) is an inter-agency cooperation between the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources-Section of Wildlife, St. Croix State Park, Superior and Chippewa National Forests, all U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service National Wildlife Refuges and Wetland Districts, Fond du Lac and White Earth Indian Reservations, Beltrami and Cass County Land Departments, Brainerd Technical Institute, the Itasca Biological Station and Crookston Campuses of the University of Minnesota, and the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission.

The routes show the distribution and annual visitation indices for furbearers, dogs, and cats in the state. Routes are generally run in a three week interval between late August and early October. Scent stations spaced 0.43 km apart along a route are baited with a biodegradable plaster-of-paris patty acid scent (Fas) disc and left overnight. Each scent station is checked and all tracks identified and documented. Data is used primarily to develop a population index.

The Morris Wetland Management District participation commenced on August 30 and was completed September 1. Fifteen routes of ten scent stations located in four counties were run: Stevens County-7 routes, Pope County-4 routes, and 2 routes each in Big Stone and Swift Counties. Survey results from Morris are shown in Table 1.

Of the 150 stations, 145 scent stations were operational during the collection period.

**Table 1 - Comparison of Scent Station Survey Data  
Morris Wetland Management District  
1990-1995**

<u>Species</u>	<u>1995</u>	<u>1994</u>	<u>1993</u>	<u>1992</u>	<u>1991</u>	<u>1990</u>
Coyote	1	1	1	0	0	0
Red Fox	20	38	24	37	19	14
Raccoon	25	36	40	28	14	2
Skunk	14	6	8	4	17	5
Dog	12	11	8	8	10	15
Cat	10	4	8	6	18	17
Mink	0	2	1	0	0	0
Badger	0	1	0	0	0	0
Weasel	0	2	0	0	0	0
Small Mammals	24	24	24	0	0	0
Deer	15	7	10	10	7	10
Birds	11	19	9	6	0	0

Red fox and raccoon visitations were high at Morris.

**Morris WMD NR95 - "Use and Nest Success in Conservation  
Reserve Program Lands In The Northeast Great Plains"**

The study was initiated in 1991 by biologists from Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center, Jamestown, North Dakota, to assess the value of the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) for diversity in North Dakota and Minnesota. Occurrence and nest success of grassland nesting ducks and the makeup of mammalian predator communities on CRP fields in six 16-square mile study areas within the Morris District centered on 4-square mile waterfowl plots on private land. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service HAPET Office (Region 6), Bismarck, North Dakota, and Minnesota DNR are the cooperating agencies. This was the final year of this study.

In Minnesota, all grassland plots of approximately 10-15 hectares were in plots of CRP land located in Stevens County. A field crew conducted two nest searches on each plot using hand-drawn rope drags. Various measurements were taken at each nest. The fate of each nest was determined by visits at two to four day intervals. The breeding population of birds was estimated at each field using a series of strip transects 100 meters wide. Robel readings were taken on six randomly selected transects in each field.

Crews searched for duck nests and Table 2 shows the 1995 apparent rate of nest-success percentages of species found.

TABLE 2 - Number of Nest and Estimates (Mayfield) of Nest Success for Upland-Nesting Ducks in Conservation Reserve Production Fields in Minnesota - 1995

<u>Study Area</u>	<u>Number of Nests</u>	<u>Percent Nest Success</u>
259	21	32
271	15	67
273	37	7
277	39	36
278	66	37
291	25	50

Results from live trapping are presented on Table 3, and percent of tracks observed during track survey on Table 4. Field testing is anticipated through 1995 and a manuscript written in 1996.

TABLE 3 - Results of Live Trapping for Franklin's Ground Squirrels and Striped Skunks on Study Areas in Minnesota - 1995

<u>Franklin's Ground Squirrel</u>			<u>Striped Skunk</u>	
<u>Study Area</u>	<u>Number Captures</u>	<u>Rate</u>	<u>Number Captures</u>	<u>Rate</u>
259	3	0.01	4	0.02
271	27	0.12	0	0.00
273	17	0.71	0	0.00
277	0	0.00	2	0.01
278	10	0.04	0	0.00
291	31	0.14	0	0.00

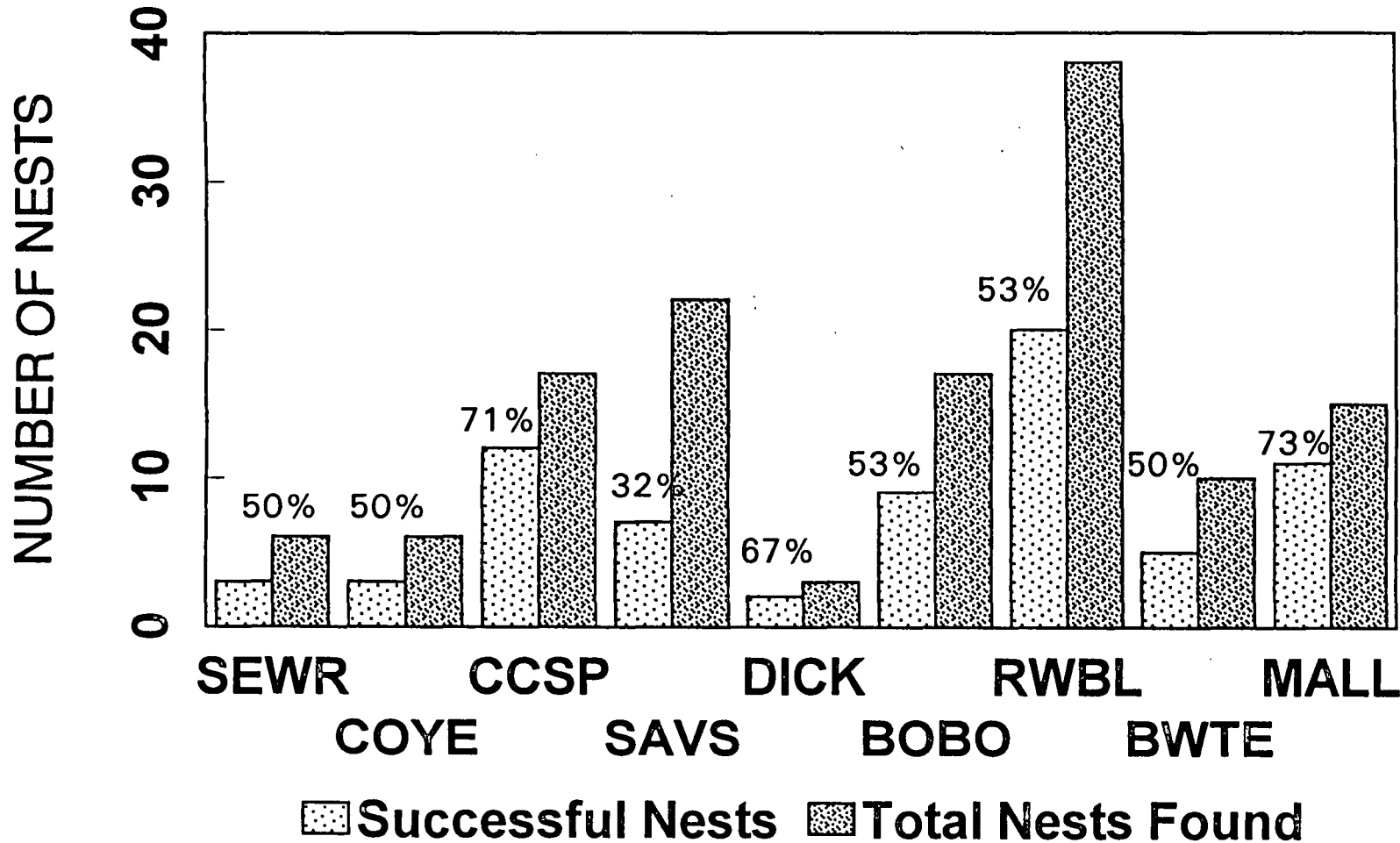
TABLE 4 - Results of Surveys for Tracks of Mammalian Predators on Study Areas in Minnesota - 1995

<u>Percent of Survey Plots With Tracks</u>						
<u>Study Area</u>	<u>Badger</u>	<u>Raccoon</u>	<u>Skunk</u>	<u>Mink</u>	<u>Fox</u>	<u>Coyote</u>
259	2	24	5	1	9	2
271	0	12	9	1	19	3
273	2	8	3	3	24	2
277	1	26	5	6	27	2
278	9	20	2	3	18	1
291	1	13	6	2	12	7

**Morris WMD NR95 - "Effects of Habitat Fragmentation on Nest Success in the Northern Great Plains"**

This study project was initiated by Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center, Jamestown, North Dakota, to assess the effect of fragmented habitat on occurrence and nest success of grass-land birds.

# STEVENS COUNTY - 1995



SEWR = Sedge Wren  
 COYE = Common Yellowthroat  
 CCSP = Clay-colored Sparrow  
 SAVS = Savannah Sparrow  
 DICK = Dickcissel

BOBO = Bobolink  
 RWBL = Red-winged Blackbird  
 BWTE = Blue-winged Teal  
 MALL = Mallard

NESTS FOUND AND PERCENT SUCCESSFUL

FIGURE 1

Objectives for the study are to: (1) estimate and compare nest success in various size patches; (2) relate success of nests to distance from various kinds of edges or predator travel lanes; (3) relate breeding densities to size of patch.

In 1995 a total of 148 nests were found which included 116 passerine nests. Data collected has been summarized by species (Figure 1). Species with small numbers of nests were not included in the figure; they were two gadwall, two mourning dove, three dickcissel, and one Le Conte's sparrow. Population changes were noted during 1995 (study was initiated in 1993) as a result of lush grass growth. Nest success was not higher in larger fields than smaller fields and may even tend to be lower in larger fields. Analysis of data from 1993 to 1995 is being conducted and is not available.

**Morris WMD NR95 - "Assessment of Potential Effects of Walleye Fingerling Production on the Ecology of Wetland Ponds in Minnesota"**

A study to evaluate the effects of walleye fingerling production on the zooplankton, macro invertebrates, and plant communities of ponds and wetlands in the Morris District was initiated in 1993. This project is being conducted by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.

The second year of field work began in May at Stammer and Hagstrom WPA's in Pope County with monthly collection of water quality, level, and transparency, macroinvertebrates, zooplankton samples, aquatic macrophytes, and fish. Fish species found at Stammer WPA were fathead minnow, brook stickleback, and Iowa darter. At Hagstrom WPA fathead minnow and brook stickleback were noted. Results from collection are currently being analyzed, and therefore are not available.

Walleye fingerlings will be introduced during 1996 and the wetland community monitored in the years following. Results will be reported and disseminated.

**Morris WMD NR95 - "Bti-Chironomid Field Dose-Response Study"**

An evaluation of the effects of the microbial pest control *Bacillus thuringiensis israelensis* (Bti) on chironomids populations is planned. Wetlands in Minnesota located on Larson WPA, Pope County, are being studied for Bti dose/response study on chironomid composition, life cycle and production. This study is being conducted by the Metropolitan Mosquito Control District, Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minnesota, the USFWS, and the Water Quality and Freshwater Ecology Program of the University of Kansas Biological Survey. Results from 1995 field work will be available next year.



**Morris WMD NR95 - "Comparison of Two Nesting Structures  
For Mallards In Pothole Habitat of  
Minnesota and Manitoba"**

A two-year graduate research study sponsored by Fish and Wildlife Service, Delta Waterfowl Foundation, and Louisiana State University-School of Forestry, Wildlife and Fisheries to evaluate nesting structures was initiated. Terry Kowalchuk, a graduate student from the University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Canada, will complete the study to attain his Master's Degree.

Objectives of the study are to: (1) determine usage rates between a hen house nesting structure constructed of fiberglass and one constructed from flax straw and wire; (2) determine nesting success between the two types of nests; (3) determine relationship between usage rates of structures and the localized upland and wetland landscape features; and (4) determine if nesting success and usage rates can be duplicated.

Each of the nesting structures were mounted on a pole and placed in wetlands in pairs to see which structure mallard ducks preferred. The study began in April and continued until July. Table 5 shows preliminary results from the year's data. Occupancy rates were lower than what has occurred in other studies. An obvious preference for the more natural appearing flax-rolled structure was observed. The final report has not been completed for incorporation into this report.

**Table 5 - Hen House Structure Study  
Results of 1995 Nesting Season**

<u>Location</u>	<u>Structure Type</u>	<u>Number Structures Available</u>	<u>Number Occupied</u>	<u>Number Successful</u>
Manitoba	Fiberglass	90	35 (38.9%)	31 (88.6%)
	Flax-rolled	90	71 (78.9%)	61 (85.9%)
Minnesota	Fiberglass	45	13 (28.9%)	11 (84.6%)
	Flax-rolled	45	18 (40.0%)	15 (83.3%)

## E. ADMINISTRATION



5 4 12 6 8 9

11 2 1 7 10 3

1. Alfred L. Radtke, Wetland Manager, GM-13, PFT.
2. Gaylord J. Bober, Refuge Operations Specialist, GS-12, PFT.
3. Bernard L. Angus, Soil Conservationist, GS-11, PFT.
4. Larry E. Lewis, Wildlife Biologist, GS-12, PFT.
5. Darrell D. Haugen, Wildlife Biologist, GS-11, PFT.
6. Chad G. Raitz, Refuge Operations Specialist, GS-9 PFT.
7. Donna M. Rieckmann, Biological Technician, GS-7, PFT.
8. Michael E. Ellis, Biological Technician, GS-7, PFT.
9. Wayne A. Henderson, Wildlife Biologist, GS-5, PFT,  
E.O.D. December 10, 1995.
10. Karen M. Stettner, Administrative Technician, GS-6, PFT.
11. Rodney G. Ahrndt, Engineering Equipment Operator, WG-8, PFT.
12. Victor H. Gades, Maintenance Worker, WG-7, PFT.
13. Kristofer Beuckens, Forestry Technician, GS-5,  
PFT Seasonal, E.O.D. April 2, 1995.



Brant Wobig, Kris Beuckens, James Laker

#### TEMPORARY PERSONNEL

James Laker, Forestry Technician, TFT, 4/02/95-10/28/95  
 Brant Wobig, Biological Technician, TFT, 4/02/95-10/28/95

#### OTHER

1. Earl Steuck, Green Thumb 10/17/94 - 6/23/95
2. Darek Mogler, C.E.P 6/13/95 - 8/18/95

#### 1. Personnel

##### MORRIS WMD STAFF SIZE, FY88-95

	Permanent Full Time	Permanent Full Time Seasonal	Permanent Part Time	Temporary GS & WG	Other Programs*
FY95	12	1	0	2	2
FY94	12	2	0	1	3
FY93	12	2	0	2	2
FY92	11	2	0	3	6
FY91	10	1	1	6	6
FY90	10	1	1	3	7
FY89	10	1	1	6	4
FY88	9	1	0	9	5

\*YCC, CETA, Work Study, Green Thumb, etc.



There were several changes in personnel this year at Morris. Both full time seasonal Forestry Technicians accepted transfers this past year. Stephen Revering transferred to Big Stone National Wildlife Refuge and Patrick Molitor transferred to Necedah National Wildlife Refuge. The Regional Office only allowed us to fill one of these permanent seasonal positions. Mr. Kristofer Beuckens was selected in March and started work in April. The other Forestry position was filled by James Laker on a temporary appointment.

Ms. Maureen Gallagher, who started her employment with the Service as a Coop Student at Morris in June of 1991 and was converted to a career conditional appointment as a Wildlife Biologist on January 3, 1993, transferred to the Fishery Resources Office in Ashland, Wisconsin, effective April 14, 1995. After a long process and two personnel freezes, Mr. Wayne Henderson filled the vacant Wildlife Biologist position on December 10. Wayne previously worked at Huron WMD, South Dakota, as an Administrative Support Assistant. Mr. Brant Wobig was our only temporary Biological Technician this past year.

2. Youth Programs

There was no YCC program at Morris WMD this year due to a lack of funds.

3. Other Manpower Programs

Green Thumb



Green Thumb Worker Earl Steuck



Mr. Earl Steuck was assigned to this office as his work site under the Green Thumb program. Earl had health problems and was assigned to another work site on June 23, 1995. We had suggested the local hospital because of Earl's reaction to dust. Earl performed 556 hours of work at this station primarily cleaning, painting, and mowing in the headquarters area before being reassigned.

Darek Mogler, a 17 year old, was able to perform 300 hours of work at Morris WMD under the C.E.P. program. Darek primarily performed light maintenance work on the buildings and grounds at the headquarters site.

#### 4. Volunteer Program

Volunteers continue to provide valuable assistance to the Morris District. The staff would like to increase the number of volunteers and continues to look for ways to reach out to the public.



Morris Public School's spring service project involved 20 students in grades 5, 6, 9, and 12 to volunteer a few hours at the Wetland Office to learn about careers with the Fish and Wildlife Service. 95-7 4/28/95 DMR

The area that received the most volunteer effort this past year was the artificial nesting structure program. Dr. Roger Strand for the second year coordinated the purchase, distribution, and collection of production data from floating cedar raft nesting structures. Dr. Strand contributed over 320 hours this past year. Jason Kirwin, a recent graduate of the University of Minnesota, Morris, spent over 100 hours checking the nest success of hen houses on WPA's. The TKE Fraternity of Morris assisted by locking the gates on the auto tour route at sunset. A number of interested individuals helped in the collection of wildflower seeds.

## 5. Funding

The station's total funding for the past six years is shown in the following table.

**MORRIS WMD FUNDING LEVELS - FY90-FY95**  
(Dollars in Thousands)

<u>FY</u>	<u>1260</u>	<u>9120</u>	<u>3110</u>	<u>YCC</u>	<u>1221</u>	<u>1230</u>	<u>1120</u>	Total <u>Budget</u>
95	536.2*	39.4	5.0	-0-	-0-	25.5	100.8	706.9**
94	596.2^	33.4	5.0	-0-	-0-	15.3	120.0	769.9
93	528.4	28.2	5.6	-0-	-0-	116.0	25.5	703.7
92	592.3^^	37.9	5.6	6.3	5.0	125.0	11.0	783.1
91	482.0	56.1	15.0	6.3	3.0	202.0	15.0	779.4
90	431.7	23.3	5.0	5.1	---	82.0	27.0	574.1

\*Includes \$61,680 of project specific funds

\*\*Does not include one time flood funds of \$217.6

^Includes \$220.8 of MMS and other project specific funds

^^Includes \$176.1 of MMS and other project specific funds

The total amount of funds for the year looked great at first glance. After a second look, things were not so great. Of the \$318,413 for private lands work, \$217,613 was Flood money. There was \$474,520 of 1260 funds to pay salaries, utilities, and manage the WPA's in the District. Over 90 percent of these 1260 funds were consumed by salaries.

## 6. Safety

There was only a single accident reported at this station during 1995. On March 4 an employee tipped over a 6 x 6 ATV while checking hen houses on a frozen marsh. The employee received bruises on the upper leg, pelvic area and ribs, all on his right side. The x-rays were negative. The employee returned to work but moved very slowly for a couple of days.

The entire staff has been tested for lyme disease. Temporaries and other personnel were tested the first and last day of work. Permanent personnel were tested once in late fall.



Following is a list of topics of our monthly meetings:

Small Boat Safety	Safe Canoeing
PFD's	Wader Safety
Safe Operation of ATV's	Hand Tool Safety
Lightning	Hunter Safety
Lock Out-Tag Out System	Controlling Spills
Material Safety Data Sheets	Skin Cancer
Fit Testing Respirators	Appliance Safety
Radon	

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.

The station now stands at 835 days without a lost-time accident.

#### 7. Technical Assistance

Throughout the year technical assistance was provided to local agencies and individuals on the following variety of topics:

- Participated in county Conservation Review Group meetings. (Staff)
- Provided assistance to Minnesota Waterfowl Association at the annual "Woody Camp." A presentation on building nest structures was given. (Lewis)
- Many high water and/or beaver complaints were received during the summer. Guidance to help take care of problems was provided. (Staff)
- Gave a talk to St. Mary's Elementary School on non-game birds, feeding, and houses. (Haugen, Angus)
- Provided assistance in planning next year's programs for the Natural History Series at Morris. (Angus, Rieckmann)
- Judged Morris Area School's Science Fair projects. (Staff)
- Participated in county Re-Invest In Minnesota (RIM) and Permanent Wetland Preserve (PWP) Screening meetings. (Raitz)
- Many calls are received from private landowners for general information on habitat development. (Staff)
- Provided recommendations at the Stevens County Water Planning Meeting. (Lewis)
- Provided recommendations to Minnesota Department of Transportation on landscaping the highway near Hancock. (Angus)
- Conducted a workshop for several Indian reservations throughout Minnesota and Wisconsin on waterfowl nesting structures. (Lewis, Raitz)
- Provided guidance to a Stevens County 4-H Club on building and placing bird houses. (Angus)
- Conducted a workshop for the leaders of the Glenwood Extension Service on how to attract and identify birds. (Rieckmann)
- Assisted Minnesota DNR in conducting Scent Post Surveys. (Ellis, Wobig, Rieckmann, Laker, Beuckens)

- Conducted a workshop on how to build bird homes for the Morris School's Earth Day volunteers. (Rieckmann)
- Conducted a workshop for Stevens County Homemaker's Extension Club on attracting birds. (Rieckmann)
- Helped to plan, develop, and design a bird sanctuary for the Morris Area High School. (Rieckmann)
- For the second year in a row the Morris WMD and Stevens County Pheasants Forever are working with the Minnesota State Highway Department to increase the amount of wildflower seed to be planted along State Highway 59 around Morris in 1996. Staff members provided guidance for the wildflower seed harvest. (Rieckmann, Angus)
- Provided assistance to county highway engineers on road improvement projects within the District. (Bober, Raitz, Lewis)
- Provided assistance to both county and state highway engineers on water/road problems. (Bober, Lewis, Raitz)
- Assisted NRCS with Wetland Determination appeals. A total of 62 landowners and 145 sites were visited. (Raitz, Lewis)
- Assisted NRCS with Minimal Effect, Mitigation, and Drainage Maintenance Agreements. Thirty-three requests were visited and recommendations sent. (Lewis, Raitz)
- Assisted with state level mitigation and minimal effect requests. (Lewis, Raitz)
- Attended and provided ideas to the West Central Environmental Education Resource Committee meeting. (Raitz, Rieckmann)
- Attended Perkins Lake Association Meetings hosted by the Minnesota DNR. (Bober)
- Attended the Grove Lake Advisory Board Meetings for best management practices around Grove Lake to develop clean water. (Haugen)
- Met with several county planning committees about high water problems. (Bober, Radtke, Lewis, Raitz)
- Provided assistance to Minnesota DNR Fisheries personnel with finding possible eligible wetlands for a research project on the effects of bait fish (fathead minnows) on restored wetlands. (Bober, Raitz)
- Met with NRCS, Minnesota DNR, and several landowners to discuss problems on Lake Johanna and possible outlet solutions. (Bober)
- Served on Chippewa River Stewardship Partnership Committee. The focus of the group is to target wetland restorations. (Radtke, Haugen, Lewis)
- Met with Minnesota DNR, landowners, county commissioners and other interested parties on Lake Emily outlet project. (Bober, Radtke)
- Met with Dr. Karsten and several research assistants to discuss field research plans for the Bti-Chironomid Field Dose-Response Study on Larson WPA. (Bober, Raitz)
- Participated in the area wide Minnesota Envirothon held at the Minnewaska Area High School. Test questions for the wildlife and wetlands sections were made and given at the event. (Lewis, Raitz)
- Provided instructions and guidance to Yellow Medicine County Pheasants Forever, East Medicine Chapter 215, on planting a wildlife tree planting on Spellman Lake WPA. (Angus, Raitz)

- Assisted NRCS in Lac qui Parle, Stevens, Swift, and Yellow Medicine Counties with evaluating and making up plans for Wetland Reserve Program candidates. (Raitz, Haugen)
- Met with Morris Area Schools and assisted with developing a resource directory for teachers to use. (Angus)
- Assisted the West Central Experiment Station with the design of native grass plots for ornamental use in landscaping. (Angus)
- Attended Traverse Lake Clean-up Project meetings. (Haugen, Lewis)
- Assisted Lori Wolf, St. Cloud Private Lands Office, on grass plot sizes for demonstration purposes. (Angus)
- Met with Red Lake Indian Reservation and advised them on native grass plantings. (Angus)

## F. HABITAT MANAGEMENT

1. General

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

## HABITAT SUMMARY - MORRIS WMD - 1995

<u>Cover Type</u>	<u>Acres</u>
Wetland	16,702
Cropland	696.5
Grassland	29,619.5
Timber	<u>1,424</u>
<b>Total</b>	<b>48,442</b>

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 1.9:1. Upland nesting cover is comprised of 7,905 acres of seeded natives, 6,404 acres of native prairie, 15,310.5 acres of introduced grass and/or legume seedings, most of which are at least 15 years old, and cropland on new fee purchase property. Native grass seed fields consist of South Dakota 149 (Forestburg) switchgrass, North Dakota 444 Indian grass (Tomahawk), South Dakota 27 big bluestem (Bonilla), and indigenous big blue, Indian, side oats grama, and little bluestem. These fields provide the bulk of seed needed for native grass plantings.

2. Wetlands

Spring wetland conditions were very good. Many wetlands in crop fields remained through most of the summer due to above average precipitation.



Yellow Water Lily (Nymphaeaceae nuphar) occurs in only one of our WPA wetlands. 95-8 6/22/95 BLA

### 3. Forests

The Morris WMD lays within what was once the "tall grass prairie." Thus, less than four percent of the fee acreage is covered by timber. Of the 1,424 acres of timber, the majority consists of older farm groves and shelterbelts.

### 4. Croplands

In 1995, 696.5 acres of cropland were managed as resident wildlife food plots. These plots were located on waterfowl production areas identified by the Minnesota DNR 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 not classified as highly erodible land 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 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 is left standing in the field in alternate strips. The alternate strips 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 - 1995

<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	117	213
Pope	4	48	73
Stevens	12	100.5	199.5
Swift	6	92	117
Traverse	<u>4</u>	<u>52</u>	<u>94</u>
<b>Totals</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>409.5</b>	<b>696.5</b>

The Stevens County Pheasants Forever chapter financed winter food plots and feeder cribs throughout the county, predominantly on private land. One plot was planted on Edwards WPA and one on Pomme de Terre River WPA, both in Stevens County. Big Stone Pheasants Forever sponsored one plot on Artichoke WPA, Big Stone County.

5. Grasslands

Grasslands consist of native prairie, native grass and introduced cool-season grass seedings, and legume plantings. Management practices include fire, grazing, and haying. Some fields have not had any active management for 20 years but still provide good cover. New fee acquisition has provided the acreage for seeding each year. 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.

Weed control on young seedings is very critical. A combination of herbicides (roundup, 2,4-D, banvel), burning, haying, and grazing are used to aid the establishment and maintenance of both native and cool-season grass seedings and legume plantings. 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.

TREATMENT OF SEEDINGS - MORRIS WMD - 1995  
(in Acres)

<u>County</u>	<u>2,4-D &amp; Banvel</u>	<u>Mowing</u>
Big Stone	100	60
Lac qui Parle	19	18
Pope	85	74
Stevens	178	76
Swift	153	65
Traverse	244	232
Yellow Medicine	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>
<b>Total</b>	<b>779</b>	<b>525</b>

All spraying was done in-house. Application rate was usually 1/2 pound A.I. 2,4-D and 1/2 pound banvel per acre.

a. **Reseeded Native Grasslands**

Since 1973 the Morris Wetland Management District has planted 7,968 acres of native grasses. Sixty-three acres were traded to Glacial Lake State Park in 1995 (Section C.1). A shift has been made to plant more local ecotypes and indigenous material. The Morris WMD supplied native grass seed and seeded the Lillie Stock upland easement property.

The Morris WMD harvested native grass seed from the following areas:

**HARVESTED NATIVE GRASS SEED - MORRIS WMD - 1995**

<u>WPA</u>	<u>Species/ Variety</u>	<u>Lbs. Cleaned Seed</u>	<u>Germ.</u>	<u>Purity</u>	<u>Harvest Date</u>
Edwards	Indian/Big Blue		14%	14% Ind.	
	Native Mix	297	65%	58% B.B.	9/12
Henry	Native Prairie		65%	27% B.B.	
		501	70%	40% Ind.	
					9/13,14,18
Lamprecht	Big Blue				
	Native Mix	950	65%	78.4%	9/20,25
Lamprecht	Big Blue-Bonilla	2203	86%	78.4%	9/26,27
Lamprecht	Switch-Forestburg	68	--	--	9/28
Schultz	Indian-Tomahawk	724	53%	77.3%	9/7,11

The Morris WMD also harvested seed for the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. Native prairie on a Wildlife Management Area was harvested on September 6. A total of 1,043 pounds of cleaned seed was obtained.

**WARM-SEASON NATIVE GRASS SEEDING - MORRIS WMD - 1995**

<u>County</u>	<u>Unit</u>	<u>Acres</u>	<u>Date</u>
Big Stone	Lillie Stock (Upland Easement)	16	June 28

b. **Cool-Season Grasslands**

No cool-season grass seedings were done in 1995.

c. **Native Prairie**

The original upland vegetation within the Morris District was tall grass prairie. The total native prairie acreage on WPA's within the District was 6,533 in 1995. One hundred twenty-nine acres of native prairie were traded to Glacial Lake State Park in 1995 (Section C.1). The areas vary in



size from less than one acre to 424 acres. Active management consisting of prescribed burning, grazing, and haying have been limited to the larger acreages. The small remnants have not been actively managed because of size, location, and staff time.



Closed Gentian (*Gentiana andrewsii*), a native prairie plant, was very colorful this year. 95-9 9/7/95 BLA

#### 7. Grazing

Controlled grazing has been used as an alternative to prescribed burning. Objectives are to reduce litter buildup and reduce competition from cool-season grass invaders. A high concentration of livestock is needed to remove a dense litter buildup and the new growth in a 30 day period of time. Grazing does not begin until approximately April 25 for two reasons:

1. Most permittees are not through calving until May 1.
2. The combination of spring rains and high A.U.M.'s can cause degradation of the sod.

Fall grazing has been considered but permittees are hesitant to have their livestock on a public area when it is open to hunting.

The grazing period is 30 days. In dry years there may not be enough vegetation to support the number of A.U.M.'s and livestock need to be taken off early. Permittees have been good to work with. This grazing period on WPA's gives their own pastures a break. However, it is becoming more difficult to find permittees as each year there are fewer cow/calf operators.



Grazing is targeted more to native prairie. Areas are normally grazed two years in a row and then rested for three to five years. Kentucky bluegrass (*Poa pratensis*) comes on very strong if grazing takes place only one year.

#### GRAZING SUMMARY - MORRIS WMD - 1995

<u>County/WPA</u>	<u>Acres</u>	<u>Actual AUM's</u>	<u>Planned AUM's</u>	<u>Fee/ AUM</u>	<u>Grazing Period</u>	<u>Scheduled Period</u>
<b>Big Stone</b>						
Thompson	65	39	50	\$3.00	4/22-5/21	4/17-5/21
<b>Lac qui Parle</b>						
Hastad	40	25	28	\$3.00	4/27-5/27	4/17-5/21
Hastad	157	90.5	120	\$3.00	4/02-6/02	4/01-5/27
<b>Stevens</b>						
Struck	<u>84</u>	<u>65</u>	<u>72</u>	\$3.25	4/22-5/21	4/22-5/21
<b>Total</b>	<b>346</b>	<b>219.5</b>	<b>270</b>			

#### 8. Haying

Haying has been used on a limited basis for noxious weed control and upland habitat management. It has been utilized primarily on pure stands of alfalfa. The annual manipulation keeps the alfalfa in a more vigorous condition. Haying is normally delayed until after July 15 to allow for duck nests to be hatched. However, on newer seedings haying may take place earlier to eliminate a serious noxious weed problem.

#### HAYING SUMMARY - MORRIS WMD - 1995

<u>County</u>	<u>WPA</u>	<u>Acres</u>	<u>Rate/Acre</u>	<u>Harvest Date</u>
Big Stone	Anderson	18	\$10.00	7/25
	Hillman	37	\$10.00	8/01
Pope	Rolling Forks	50*	\$10.00	7/15
	Rolling Forks		\$10.00	9/01
	Westport	70	\$10.00	7/30
Stevens	Thorstad	35*	\$10.00	7/15
	Thorstad		\$ 8.00	9/03
Swift	Fahl	57*	\$10.00	7/20
	Fahl		\$10.00	9/03
	Monson Lake	39	\$15.00	7/17
Traverse	Gibson	24	\$ 5.00	7/30
	Robinhood	60*	\$20.00	7/17
	Robinhood	—	\$ 5.00	9/03
<b>Total</b>		<b>390</b>		

\*Fields were hayed twice

## 9. Fire Management

A total of 2,198 acres was prescribe burned in 1995.  
Experienced employees aided in making the burning program more efficient.

### PREScribed BURN SUMMARY - MORRIS WMD - 1995 (In Acres)

<u>County/WPA</u>	<u>Date Burned</u>	<u>Native Prairie</u>	<u>Intro. Natives</u>	<u>DNC</u>	<u>Marsh</u>	<u>Trees</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Cost/Acre</u>	<u>Total Man Hours</u>
<b>Big Stone</b>									
Akron	5/15		54				54	\$2.29	7.5
Daly	5/15		16	1			17	\$4.38	4.0
Henry	5/05	16	44				60	\$4.03	14.0
Rothi	5/05	9	59	71			139	\$ .51	4.0
Twin Lakes	5/02	128			2		130	\$3.25	32.25
<b>Lac qui Parle</b>									
Hegland	5/11	330		45	37	12	424	\$ .72	19.0
Hegland-DNR	5/11	64					64	\$ .72	
Hegland- (private)	5/11	42					42	\$ .72	
<b>Pope</b>									
Froland	4/28	23	6	40			69	\$2.77	12.5
Glacial Lake	5/18	29					29	\$4.69	8.0
Lake Johanna	5/01	20	75	61			156	\$2.74	27.5
<b>Stevens</b>									
Edwards	5/16		6				6	\$9.76	3.0
Edwards	5/17	35	9	12		6	62	\$2.59	10.0
Lamprecht	5/11	3	143	10			156	\$1.99	19.0
Landers	4/27		52	2	2		56	\$3.32	12.75
Mero	5/02		181	6			187	\$ .51	8.25
Miller	4/27	29		54	3		86	\$2.16	10.5
Schultz	5/04		15				15	\$12.14	12.0
Weiler	4/24		14	13	2		29	\$8.00	45.0
<b>Swift</b>									
Artichoke Lk	5/15	1	148		3		152	\$ .94	9.0
Lynch Lake	4/28	16		129	17		162	\$3.46	37.0
<b>Traverse</b>									
Hormann	4/26	—	—	101	2	—	103	\$1.84	12.0
<b>Total</b>		<b>745</b>	<b>822</b>	<b>545</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>2,198</b>		<b>307.25</b>

Average Cost/Acre                      \$3.46

Average Man Hours/Burn              15.36

10. Pest Controla. Insect

Nothing to report.

b. Plant

## NOXIOUS WEED CONTROL - MORRIS WMD - 1995

	<u>Contract</u>		<u>Force</u>		<u>Account</u>		<u>Totals</u>	
	<u>Spraying</u>		<u>Spraying</u>		<u>Mowing</u>			
<u>County</u>	<u>No.</u>		<u>No.</u>		<u>No.</u>		<u>*No.</u>	
	<u>WPAs</u>	<u>Acres</u>	<u>WPAs</u>	<u>Acres</u>	<u>WPAs</u>	<u>Acres</u>	<u>WPAs</u>	<u>Acres</u>
Big Stone	0	0	3	26	2	54	5	80
Lac qui Parle	0	0	6	17	2	2	8	19
Pope	0	0	4	13	0	0	4	13
Stevens	0	0	5	37	2	21	7	58
Swift	0	0	4	17	0	0	4	17
Traverse	0	0	2	25	0	0	2	25
Yellow Med.	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>5</u>
1995 Total	0	0	25	140	6	77	31	217
1994 Total	0	0	38	386.5	12	133.7	50	520
1993 Total	0	0	23	111	10	143	33	254
1992 Total	1	18	54	653	4	72	59	743
1991 Total	2	73	58	321	5	62	65	456
1990 Total	0	0	65	922	20	337	85	1259
1989 Total	8	183	62	599	29	268	99	1050
1988 Total	70	2420.5	75	1045	6	160	122	3625

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

Of the 31 WPA's treated for noxious weed control, 15 were treated for thistle, 8 for spurge, and 8 for both spurge and thistle. Compared to the last 8 years, this year had the fewest acres treated for noxious weeds. This is a result of reduced funding which limits manpower and the ability to purchase herbicides. Reduced weed control impacts the District in many ways. Neighbors and local government officials perceive the Morris District as doing an effective job of wildlife management in large part by the amount of weed control performed on the WPA's. Lack of an active, effective weed control program leads to many complaints from neighbors, resistance to acquisition of additional land, and lack of local support for many Service programs. Since about 1978 our degree of weed control has not been a major issue with most neighbors and local officials but now once again we are starting to hear: "Why do you want more, you can't take care of the land you have." With most WPA's surrounded by corn and soybean fields, which are weed free, WPA's with weeds are considered a threat to the local economy.

13. WPA/Easement Monitoringa. **Easements**EASEMENT ENFORCEMENT SUMMARY - MORRIS WMD - 1995

Cases closed during 1995	1
Cases forwarded for legal action	0
New fall 1995 violations (unresolved)	0
Total cases outstanding December 31, 1995	10

Fall easement surveillance flights were accomplished November 21-22. During easement flights we also photographed other potential wetland violations and reported them to CFSA, Minnesota DNR, and Corps of Engineers. Duplicate photos are usually sent with the priority turn-ins so responsible authorities have copies. Those sincere about protecting wetlands appreciate and use the photo evidence in resolving the problem. Others may do what they have to because they are concerned that the photos will haunt them if they fail their responsibility. Still others are legal activities ...or you just can't win.

b. **Waterfowl Production Areas**

Most WPA problems are detected during routine work activities, while flying easement checks, or from public turn-in. Typical problems include farming encroachment, rock dumping, sign damage, vehicle trespass, dead animal and/or garbage dumping, and private drainage affecting WPA wetlands.

Most problems are caused by neighboring landowners or renters. The preferred procedure is to negotiate a solution without creating a neighboring enemy. Legal action is usually a last resort. Other violations such as vehicle trespass, dumping, littering, etc., are highly visible, but it's difficult and rare to catch someone.

Noteworthy is a case in Pope County on Froland WPA. A neighbor gained NRCS approval to construct an unnecessary erosion control waterway onto this WPA. The ditch would have partially drained a wetland on the neighbor's property. We denied the neighbor access and elevated the NRCS approval to state level for policy review. As a result, the waterway recommendation was determined inappropriate and (we hope) clear precedent and rule interpretation was set.

**Lake Cochrane**

At the southwestern corner of our District, approximately a quarter mile from the South Dakota state line, a controversy developed in 1994 when a Minnesota rural water system provider used FmHA funding to dig three high capacity wells to help accommodate the water needs of 21 cities/towns and 2,385 rural customers. Environmental concerns about the potential adverse effects from pumping on hydrology of nearby Lake Cochrane, the Sioux Nation Calcarious Fen, and other lakes, fens, and wetlands in the area prompted several monitoring sites to be established by the owners of the well

system. Written reports will be provided to the Minnesota DNR.

One of the monitoring sites was set up on a wetland on Dakota WPA located one mile east of the well site. Established were three shallow wells to measure ground-water elevation changes and a weir at the wetland outlet to measure outflow when it occurs. Combined with data from other monitoring sites, any surface water impacts from pumping should be detected.

Reports received and forwarded to Minnesota DNR provided no cause for alarm in CY95, but this was a very wet year. Problems with the weir design which allowed water to flow under it were repaired. Monitoring continues.

#### 15. Private Lands

The Private Lands section is divided into three categories in this report: a. Private Lands-Enhancement, b. Private Lands-Wetland Restorations, and c. Swampbuster.

##### a. Private Lands-Enhancement

The Private Lands-Enhancement program is an extension and environmental educational program aimed at improving wildlife habitat and land management practices on private property. This is accomplished through environmental educational presentations to schools, scout groups, and 4-H programs as well as programs, meetings, and display booths for local government agencies, sportsman groups, and civic functions. One-on-one contacts are also made with private landowners and other interested parties in which advice and technical assistance is given on specific wildlife development projects pertaining to their property. Landowners are also informed of various land protection and easement programs available to them through various State and Federal agencies.

The majority of our efforts are placed on wetland restoration projects. These projects are designed and construction costs paid for by the Morris WMD. On projects such as food plots and tree plantings in which only technical assistance was available through the Morris office, interested parties were advised as to the projects which would be beneficial to their property and referred to the Minnesota DNR, Soil and Water Conservation District, Pheasants Forever chapter, or some other agency where further assistance, including financial assistance, may be available.

Very close and fruitful working relationships have developed with the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), Minnesota State Agencies, Lake Associations, and Watershed Districts. We actively promote their programs such as Reinvest-In-Minnesota and Wetland Reserve Program and they in return promote and refer interested landowners to our private lands program.

Lake associations and watershed districts are also turning to us for assistance in improving the water quality of area lakes. In the past we have worked on projects for Big Stone, Niemackl, Traverse, and Grove Lakes. Again this past year, a member of the staff served on a seven member committee with the North Fork Crow River Watershed District, Grove Lake-Lake Owner's Association, Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA), NRCS, and private landowners developing a grant proposal for funding through MPCA's Clean Water Partnership involving Grove Lake.

Our involvement in the Chippewa River Stewardship Partnership (CRSP) continued in 1995. The Partnership was formed in 1994 by a group of farmers, landowners, urban residents and representatives from local, public, and private organizations concerned about water quality and flood related problems in the Chippewa River watershed. The partnership combines the resources and activities of Federal, State, and local resource agencies with those of non-government organizations and private landowners to enhance environmental quality and expand economic opportunities of the Chippewa River. Wetland restorations to improve water quality, reduce downstream flooding, and enhance wildlife habitat are a major objective of the partnership.

Following the \$200,000 1994 Grant to CRSP from the McKnight Foundation, the Morris WMD entered into a cooperative agreement with the Minnesota Waterfowl Association which added another \$150,000 to the partnership. From here the Partnership's goal for 1995 was to locate at least two major wetland restoration projects and to have all preparatory aspects (survey, design, etc.) of the restoration completed by 1996. To accomplish this several potential sites were located with public meetings held to obtain the public's input and support. Some positive and very negative inputs were received. A reported property rights group set progress back a few steps by opposing all wetland restorations in the area and reportedly threatening landowners if they got involved with the partnership. By years end easement negotiations were in the works with one landowner involving approximately 140 acres of restored wetland and grassed buffer area. Another potential restoration site involving approximately 100 acres was surveyed.

As part of the private lands program, the Morris WMD has promoted and made available waterfowl nesting structures designed to deter or limit nest predation. In past years three types of structures have been used: fiberglass nesting cones, a 46 inch by six foot high fiberglass tub or culvert, and floating nest structures. This year a cylindrical nesting structure referred to by DELTA as a "hen house" was also made available. The floating structure and hen house were made available to the public through a grant from Ducks Unlimited (Section G.3.d). The program was expanded because of limited success with the fiberglass nesting cone and tub.



b. **Private Lands-Wetland Restorations**

Wetland restorations under the Service's Partners for Wildlife program declined slightly in 1995, however the work load seems to increase every year. The above normal precipitation and high water levels the past four years have increased the number of repairs needed on existing dikes. Not only are dikes that have been put in recently through our private lands program needing repairs, older dikes put in by the Fish and Wildlife Service and NRCS 20 to 30 years ago are also needing repairs. In cases where the Service has a permanent easement on the restored wetland, we are responsible for the maintenance. In NRCS's case, landowners are referred to us by NRCS because they do not have the money necessary to complete the repairs. Many repairs required replacing water control structures that had washed out or rusted away or dikes that had been damaged by either muskrat or beaver. The high water levels also increased the number of high water complaints involving wet, soggy fields to flooded roads. Many of the complainants know of a restoration project in the area and automatically blame the restoration for their water problems. We met with all complainants and tried to relieve or alleviate their concerns or problems. In some cases this required the lowering of spillways, the removal of beaver dams, or repairing leaky dikes.



Frederickson-Weher 80-acre restoration in the hills of southern Pope County. 95-10 4/95 DDH

## WETLAND RESTORATIONS - MORRIS WMD - CALENDAR YEAR 1995

<u>County</u>	<u>CRP</u>		<u>Other</u>		<u>Total</u>	
	<u>Restorations</u>		<u>Restorations</u>		<u>Restorations</u>	
	<u>Basins</u>	<u>Acres</u>	<u>Basins</u>	<u>Acres</u>	<u>Basins</u>	<u>Acres</u>
Big Stone	0	0	11	13	11	13
Lac qui Parle	3	21	0	0	3	21
Pope	2	2	16	74	18	76
Stevens	0	0	3	4	3	4
Swift	0	0	3	59	3	59
Traverse	1	7	2	7	3	14
Yellow Medicine	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>83</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>83</u>
Total 1995	6	30	43	240	49	270
Total 1994	3	3	75	553	78	556
Total 1993	20	102	97	406	117	508
Total 1992	25	60	60	168	85	228
Total 1991	38	73	68	782	106	855
Total 1990	36	115	45	163	81	278
Total 1989	66	236	18	46	84	282
Total 1988	166	352	42	341	208	693
Total 1987	<u>26</u>	<u>46</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>33</u>	<u>33</u>	<u>79</u>
GRAND TOTAL	386	1017	455	2732	841	3749

Some numbers have been adjusted to reflect corrected totals.

In past years we have advertised our private lands restoration program through ads placed in local newspapers, displays at county fairs and local events, and direct mailings using the Consolidated Farm Service Agency's (CFSA) mailing list of owners and operators for the county. This year CFSA decided they could not furnish us the address of owners and operators from their mailing list because it was an invasion of privacy. We contacted the Soil and Water Conservation District in Lac qui Parle County and were able to include our restoration flier in their newsletter. Our flier reached approximately 2,200 homes. The response to this mailing was very light.

An agreement between the Fish and Wildlife Service and NRCS calls for all restoration projects to follow NRCS guidelines. District personnel are allowed to engineer restoration projects with watersheds of less than 100 acres. Restorations with watersheds over 100 acres must be designed by a professional engineer. This is accomplished either through the Fish and Wildlife Service private lands engineer in St. Cloud, Regional Office engineers, or NRCS engineers. Once designed, the plan must be signed off by the county CFSA office for CRP land and the local watershed district where applicable. In some cases a Minnesota DNR permit is also required.





95-11 8/25/93 BLA

Nine wetlands totaling 32 acres were restored on the Jeff Brown property in Pope County. Permanent easements were taken on all of the restorations.



95-12 8/22/95 CGR

A total of 23 landowners cooperated with the Service to restore 49 wetlands during the calendar year. Wetland restorations were completed in all seven counties of the District for a total of 270 acres restored. The typical restoration averaged 5.51 acres per restoration in 1995 at an average cost of \$336.03 per acre. Restorations on CRP land were very limited again this year as many CRP contracts are nearing expiration.

In addition to the 23 landowners involved in wetland restoration projects, 12 landowners were involved in dike repair projects. A total of 36 restorations required repairs, three water control structures and 33 dikes. A total of \$18,301.75 was spent on repairs involving 217 wetland acres. The average repair cost was \$508.38 per project and \$84.34 per wetland acre.

The Morris WMD expended 1.1 FTE's of effort over the past year on the station's private lands program. The transfer of one full time and one part time employee left the private lands program short 1.1 FTE's for FY95. Funding for the program came from Fish and Wildlife Service Partners for Wildlife funds, North American Waterfowl Management Plan funds, and private donations. The FY95 budget was \$100,800 with an additional \$23,200 from North American Waterfowl Management Plan, \$14,000 from Region 3 Challenge Grant Program, \$31,901.50 from private donations, and \$195,498 from Flood fund allocations. The Flood fund monies were allocated for FY94 and FY95. This budget must cover salaries, supplies, and construction costs for new restorations as well as repairs on past restoration projects.

#### CONTRIBUTED FUNDS IN 1995

North American Waterfowl Management Plan	\$23,200.00
Ducks Unlimited-MARSH	10,000.00
Hadley Companies	2,000.00
Upper Minnesota River Watershed District	2,000.00
Wildlife Forever	3,000.00
Deer Hunters Association	3,000.00
Minnesota Waterfowl Association	1,927.50
Swift County Pheasants Forever	774.00
The Nature Conservancy	<u>9,200.00</u>
<b>Total Contributed</b>	<b>\$55,101.50</b>

The Nature Conservancy funds were matched with Region 3's Challenge Grant funds for a 46 acre prairie restoration project in the Conservancy's Plover Prairie area in Lac qui Parle County near Big Stone National Wildlife Refuge. The Nature Conservancy completed the restoration project under a cooperative agreement with the Morris WMD.

c. **Swampbuster**

The swampbuster provisions of the Farm Bill legislation have us involved in wetland appeals, exemption requests, turn-ins of potential wetland conversion violations, minimal effect/drainage maintenance agreements/mitigation requests, and the wetland reserve program.

Wetland Appeals

The wetland appeal process is initiated when a landowner challenges the NRCS determination that areas of his property are classified "wetland." As a consultant, the Service employee and the NRCS representative visit the site, review CFSA slides, check available wetland inventories, and then confirm or reverse the initial NRCS determination. Most determinations are upheld and most NRCS field offices appear to be doing a reasonable job, although sometimes rather obvious wetlands are not on the NRCS initial map. More disturbing is the current policy which prevents those missed wetlands from being added. If the landowner still disagrees he may appeal his case to the next level of authority.

In 1995, the Morris Wetland staff reviewed 62 landowner appeals involving 145 potential wetlands. Cumulative totals since the beginning of swampbuster are 1,008 appeals involving 2,883 areas. Of these, 2,031 were upheld as wetlands and 852 were determined non-wetlands. This year two areas that were missed were also added to the inventory.

Exemption Requests

Another portion of the Farm Bill Swampbuster legislation allows landowners or ditch authorities exemption from swampbuster provisions if they meet third party criteria.

Third party exemption provisions are intended for situations where a landowner has no control over or involvement in wetland conversion activities done by a "third party." No third party exemptions were applied for in 1995. Often a landowner wants a township or similar entity to drain something on his behalf. When this occurs, they are clearly not third party victims and exemption criteria doesn't apply. Rules properly applied prevent you from getting bogus third party claims.

Turn-ins of Potential Wetland Conversion Violations

Another key role has been our reporting of potential violations. Swampbuster legislation of 1985 was very severe and did little to encourage enforcement of wetland restoration. The 1990 regulations reduced penalties and encouraged restorations.

In 1995, seven Wetland Impact Reports of potential wetland conversions were sent to CFSA offices in the Morris District. A total of 223 have been submitted since swampbuster began. The 1985 legislation required wetland conversion,

seeding, and participation in Federal farm programs before benefits could be withheld. Changes in the 1990 Farm Bill made only the act of converting a wetland the trigger for penalties and encouraged restoration of the wetland by offering a reduced penalty if restoration was done. No restoration agreements were processed in 1995. An owner who decides not to restore forfeits his total payment and must get out of the farm program. Some have. Many potential violation turn-ins are determined legal activities not causing wetland conversion.

Swampbuster, combined with Corps of Engineers 404 authority and the new Minnesota Wetlands Conservation Act, have done much to curb drainage. We have gained respectful attention of most drainage proponents and have witnessed a significant reduction in drainage, especially larger wetlands. Old opportunities to purchase and destroy wetlands for profit without being challenged no longer exist. The message we hope to groom is "If you buy a wetland--you own a wetland--and you have a social obligation to pass it on in tact to future generations."

#### Minimal Effect/Drainage Maintenance Agreements/ Mitigation Requests

The minimal effect evaluation and agreement are for activities which have a truly minimal effect on the hydrological and biological functions of a wetland. Drainage Maintenance Agreements are for drainage systems through a wetland (W) which has an outlet for PC, FW or FWP areas and limited maintenance can be justified. Mitigation is the replacement of lost wetland functions and values by restoring a previously and effectively drained wetland of equal or greater size.

Twenty-four minimal effect, five drainage maintenance, and four mitigation requests were processed in 1995. Minimal effect and drainage maintenance requests must meet rather strict criteria or they are denied. Many of those approved required modifications to eliminate or minimize wetland impacts. Many applications this year came from Big Stone and Lac qui Parle Counties where exceptionally high water for a second year has created several situations justifying temporary drainage because major roads or buildings were threatened.

To date one mitigation proposal has been approved. Generally, existing wetlands are proposed for improvement rather than the required true restoration of a prior converted area. Only one so far has been willing to restore an effectively drained area and maintain the "no net loss" policy!

### Wetland Reserve Program

The Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) is a voluntary USDA program that offers landowners a chance to receive payment for restoring and protecting wetlands on their property. An easement payment is offered for the wetland acres and a small buffer zone. Cost sharing is allowed for the wetland restoration.

Good in theory, the program doesn't impact many areas or acres in comparison to the old waterbank program. WRP still needs improvement. Of the 16 applicants received in our seven counties in 1995, five are known to remain active. Landowners may back out any time until the contract is final. The successful and popular Federal Waterbank Program is being phased out in favor of WRP; so hopefully improvements continue.

### Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)

The Conservation Reserve Program had much debate and publicity regarding program renewal. A continued program appears inevitable. Currently 180,504 acres are enrolled in this program in our seven counties. Our District totals for sign-ups through 1995 are:

<u>County</u>	<u>Acres Enrolled</u>
Big Stone	18,970
Lac qui Parle	38,156
Pope	36,709
Stevens	23,613
Swift	23,633
Traverse	8,723
Yellow Medicine	<u>30,700</u>
<b>Total</b>	<b>180,504</b>

This acreage is well over three times our fee ownership. Also, many of our private land restorations occurred on CRP lands. Our interest in this valuable program is obvious.

Current ten year CRP contracts began expiring in 1995 and early withdrawal was allowed for other qualifying areas. Most will terminate between 1996 and 1998. Authorization to renew CRP for more years has occurred as of February, 1996, but debate about program funding and land eligibility continues. Most agree that CRP has been the best wildlife program since the Soil Bank Program of the 1950's and 1960's. There is widespread support from conservation organizations and farm groups for continuing CRP. We hope this all too important program maintains liberal funding and sound direction.



## G. WILDLIFE

1. Wildlife Diversity

Waterfowl production areas in the Morris Wetland Management District contain a diversity of habitat types that supports over 260 species of birds, 55 species of mammals, and numerous species of reptiles, amphibians and insects. The keys to maintaining this diversity are habitat preservation and manipulation. Manipulation activities used to maintain wildlife diversity are: water level management, prescribed burning, grassland establishment, woodlot improvement, and wildlife food plot establishment.

2. Endangered and/or Threatened Species

Three bald eagle nesting attempts have been documented in the District with the following productivity. In Lac qui Parle County a pair fledged two young. At Marsh Lake Dam in Swift County one young successfully fledged. A pair located on private property in Yellow Medicine County successfully raised two birds. Other observations of bald eagles occur mainly throughout the fall, winter, and spring months.

Peregrine falcon have occurred within the District but none were observed this year.

Other species found on units in the past or have the potential to occur within the Morris District and determined endangered (E), threatened (T), or species of special concern (S) by the State of Minnesota are:

Birds

horned grebe S  
 American white pelican S  
 American bittern S  
 red-shouldered hawk S  
 bald eagle T  
 osprey S  
 peregrine falcon E  
 greater prairie chicken S  
 sandhill crane S  
 yellow rail S  
 common moorhen S  
 upland sandpiper S  
 marbled godwit S  
 Wilson's phalarope S  
 common tern S  
 Forester's tern S  
 short-eared owl S  
 burrowing owl E  
 Sprague's pipit E  
 loggerhead shrike T  
 sharp-tailed sparrow S  
 Henslow's sparrow S  
 Baird's sparrow E  
 chestnut-collared  
 longspur E

Mammals

mule deer S  
 eastern spotted skunk S  
 mountain lion S

Reptiles & Amphibians

snapping turtle S  
 five-lined skink E  
 western hognose snake S

Fish

black redhorse S  
 pugnose minnow S  
 paddlefish S  
 shovelnose sturgeon S

Butterflies & Moths

dorcas copper S  
 Leonardus skipper S

Plants

ball cactus T  
 small-leaved pussytoes S  
 buffalo grass S  
 Hill's thistle S  
 western prairie fringed orchid T

Presently there are no efforts to evaluate populations mentioned above because no funding exists for monitoring. However, observations of the American bittern, American white pelican, greater prairie chicken, sandhill crane, upland sandpiper, marbled godwit, Wilson's phalarope, osprey, loggerhead shrike, Henslow's sparrow, mule deer, and snapping turtle were reported in the Morris District.

### 3. Waterfowl

#### a. Swans

Tundra swans are common migrants throughout the Morris District. First observation of the spring migrants were a pair observed south of Cyrus, Pope County, on March 16. Normal numbers of migrating swans were observed.

#### b. Geese

Canada geese are common in the Morris District, becoming extremely abundant during the fall. With mild winters some geese remain in the area. Northward migrants began showing up in Big Stone County on February 20. Local populations of resident breeders are experiencing very high productivity.



I thought this winter business was over!  
95-13 4/12/95 BLA

Although the white-fronted goose is a common visitor during migration, no sightings were reported.

Snow geese were once very common during migration but populations have recently shifted their migration route to the west, by-passing our District. However, on March 13, three white-phase snows stopped in below the office.

The Ross' goose is listed as an accidental in Minnesota with most reports occurring in the southern part of the state. There were no reported sightings in our District in 1995.

c. **Ducks**

Most ducks arrive on their breeding ground from late March to early May. The first observation of spring migrants in the Morris District was on February 26. Common merganser, northern pintail, ring-necked duck, mallard, wood duck, and gadwall were the first arrivals. Number and species diversity increased as wetlands opened around the middle of March. Other species recorded in the District during the year include: green-winged teal, blue-winged teal, American widgeon, redhead, northern shoveler, common goldeneye, canvasback, greater scaup, lesser scaup, bufflehead, ruddy duck, red-breasted merganser, and hooded merganser.

d. **Waterfowl Production**

Wetland and upland conditions were good to excellent for waterfowl throughout the District. Canada goose numbers continue to increase. Breeding pair estimates are provided by Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center using results of our Four-Square Mile Survey. Results from 46 plots are shown below.

**FOUR SQUARE MILE SURVEY BREEDING PAIR ESTIMATES  
Morris WMD - 1995**

	<u>Easement</u>	<u>Federal</u>	<u>Private</u>	<u>Total</u>
Breeding Pairs	4,327	5,467	56,300	66,094
Pairs/Area (Sq Mi)	53.30	56.66	12.46	14.07
Pairs/Area Wet (Sq Mi)	241.14	132.92	178.87	176.80
Pairs/Wet Ponds	2.17	3.39	2.01	2.09

Breeding pair estimates were down from the previous year, however recruitment rates show good promise. Recruitment rates for the District's mallards were 0.63, gadwall 0.97, blue-winged teal 0.99, northern shoveler 0.88, northern pintail 0.66, and overall rate of 0.82 in 1995.

Morris WMD has been developing and field testing waterfowl nest structures since 1991. As the lead District for the Minnesota Waterfowl and Wetland Management Complex responsible for nest structure work, we have sought to develop productive duck nesting structures for use by interested citizens, wildlife clubs, and wildlife managers. Several designs have been tested with varying degrees of success. We have promoted use of those that have been most successful.

Our most successful was a floating cedar raft type with several available nest sites for ducks and a goose. This type was distributed throughout Minnesota through the efforts of Service Volunteer Roger Strand who coordinated the program and Ducks Unlimited who again provided \$20,000 in cost-share funding for the purchase of structures. This

brings their total contributions since 1993 to \$44,000. Their contributions were matched by private individuals, sportsman clubs, and conservation agencies to accomplish a total project distribution of 800 floating nest structures state wide. Most were placed in the prairie pothole region of west-central Minnesota. After five years of maintenance and reporting, the structure becomes the property of the cooperator.

In the second year of volunteering his time, Roger Strand reported the following results of 724 structures sold.

**724 Structures Sold** (361 in 1994 and 363 in 1995)

**119 Structures judged not available for nesting in 1995\***

- 37 Structure intact but not placed in wetland in 1995
- 28 No report/no identifying information; Evansville Sportsman Club/Pioneer Trust
- 20 Capsized early and not righted during nesting season
- 12 Dry land problem; floating bog, rope failure, drained wetland
- 9 Lost to study; destroyed by ice/floating bog, lost downriver
- 8 Needed repairs/not placed; broke early/not replaced
- 5 Placed in wetland but never checked for results

\*It was determined that in order to accurately assess the value of the project's structure as a nesting site it had to actually have been present as an upright floater during the nesting season to count as available.

**605 Structures were available for nesting waterfowl in 1995 on which 614 nesting attempts were reported.**

**NEST FATES OF 614 ATTEMPTS - 1995**

<u>Species</u>	<u>Nests</u>	<u>Hatched</u>	<u>Depredated</u>	<u>Abandoned</u>	<u>Capsized</u>	<u>Unknown</u>
Ducks	584	449	45	62	3	25
		77%	8%	11%	1%	4%
Canada Geese	30	26	0	1	1	2

**NESTING BY SPECIES OF 614 ATTEMPTS**

Mallard	483 nests
Canada goose	30 nests
Woodduck	8 nests
Blue-winged teal	2 nests
Gadwall	2 nests
Widgeon	1 nest
Redhead	1 nest
Unknown duck	<u>87 nests</u>
Total	614 nests



DISTANCE FROM SHORE (WHERE KNOWN)  
SUCCESS VS PREDATION

391 Hatched duck nests  
- Average distance from shore = 85 yards  
41 Depredated nests  
- Average distance from shore = 49 yards

COMPARISON OF NESTING RESULTS IN 1994 AND 1995

In 1994 there were 318 structures available. There were 258 duck/goose nests initiated or .8 per structure. Of these, 206 nests (80 percent) hatched. The average structure yield was .65 hatched nests per structure. Eight percent of the duck nests were predated.

In 1995 there were 605 structures available. There were 614 duck/goose nests initiated or 1+ per structure. Of these, 475 nests (77 percent) hatched. The average structure yield was .79 hatched nests per structure. Eight percent of the duck nests were predated.

The outlook after two years of cooperator reporting is good. Production seems to be rising with no significant change in predation or abandonment rates. The percent unavailable went from 12 to 16 and hopefully will not continue increasing as this is largely a project of volunteer citizens and sportsman clubs with little or no budget. The floating structures are very productive and practical in larger wetlands. They also require a significant labor/time commitment in exchange for their high productivity.



Volunteer Project Coordinator Roger Strand (left) is largely responsible for 681 successfully hatched waterfowl nests in the two years he has lead DU's cost-share floating nest structure program. 95-14 3/14/94 LEL

Project Coordinator Roger Strand (retired) has displayed the enthusiasm and commitment of a professional biologist. He will gather reports and summarize data for two more years, so stay tuned.

Morris WMD monitored three nesting structure projects to gather reliable information and share results with others (Tables 6 and 7).

Project 1 (Table 6)

Determine use and success of 150 pole structures converted from Ducks Unlimited fiberglass basket to a pole with two nesting cylinders attached. This type has been found to protect nesters from predation and offers two nesting sites per structure. Of the 150 structures available, 87 were checked. Of these, 38 were used and 52 nests were initiated. Of the nests attempted, 43 hatched and nine were abandoned. This nesting structure type hatched 0.49 nests per structure during 1995.

Project 2 (Table 6)

Determine use and success of cedar box pole structure. This was the third year of monitoring on this type. Spring ice damage continues to be a problem and now only 16 of the original 25 remain. All but three boxes were used in 1995. A goose and wood duck nest were among the 20 successful nests hatched. This structure had an impressive 1.25 nests per structure hatch rate.

Project 3 (Table 7)

Determine the preferred structure type, most successful, and nest structure density limit on three separate wetlands located on Dismal Swamp WPA in Big Stone County, Schultz WPA in Stevens County, and Walden WPA in Pope County. The three types of nest structures placed were the cedar floater, double cylinder on fiberglass Ducks Unlimited basket, and fiberglass cylinder (Backes). Of the 34 structures available, 27 were used containing 48 nests of which 30 hatched, 8 were predated, and 10 abandoned. The cedar floater was the type ducks preferred most with all 12 used. These had 25 nests initiated with 16 hatching. As expected, predation was also highest on this structure type with six nests destroyed on three structures.




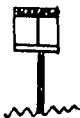
Overall, 93 nests hatched successfully from 137 structures monitored in the three projects. Excellent habitat conditions from the above average precipitation may have influenced results, although breeding pair numbers were down in the District. We continue to learn and share our results with a receptive Minnesota public that wants to know what they can do that will work on their property.....so we keep learning.

## COMPARISON CHART

## 1993-1995 POLE MOUNTED NEST STRUCTURES

Table 6










## MORRIS WETLAND MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

Structure Type	Nest Sites/ Structure	Number Structures Available	No/Percent Structures Used	Total Number Nests	No/Percent Success	No/Percent Predated	No/Percent Abandoned	No/Percent Unknown or Destroyed High Water
<u>POLES</u>								
Wreath - 1993	1	50	12 / 24%	10 (D) 3 (G)	5 / 50% 2 / 67%	0 0	2 / 20% 0	3 / 30% 1 / 33%
 - 1994	1	15	9 / 60%	5 (D) 5 (G)	5 / 100% 3 / 60%	0 0	0 2 / 40%	0 0
Single Cylinder - 1993	1	49	3 / 6%	3 (D)	2 / 67%	0	0	1 / 33%
 - 1994	1	20	5 / 25%	5 (D)	5 / 100%	0	0	0
Double Cylinder - 1993	2	49	7 / 14%	11 (D)	10 / 91%	0	1 / 9%	0
 - 1994	2	23	9 / 39%	12 (D)	7 / 58%	0	5 / 42%	0
- 1995	2	87	38 / 44%	52 (D)	43 / 83%	0	9 / 17%	0
Cedar Boxes - 1993	3	25	3 / 12%	1 (D) 2 (G)	0 2 / 100%	0 0	0 0	1 / 100% 0
 - 1994	3	17	10 / 59%	9 (D) 4 (G)	8 / 89% 4 / 100%	0 0	1 / 11% 0	0 0
- 1995	3	16	13 / 81%	21 (D) 1 (G)	19 / 90% 1 / 100%	1 / 5% 0	1 / 5% 0	0 0

D = Duck (nearly 100% Mallards)  
G = Goose

Table 7

COMPARISON CHART - NEST STRUCTURES  
FINAL REPORT SATURATION FIELD TESTS  
1995 NESTING SEASON  
MORRIS WETLAND MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

WPA Area	Structure Type	Nest Sites/ Structure	Number Structure Available	No/Percent Structure Used	Total Number Nests	No/Percent Success	No/Percent Predated	No/Percent Abandoned
Dismal Swamp	-Cedar Floater 	3	4	4 / 100%	9	6 / 67%	1 / 11%	2 / 22%
	-Double Cylinder on Fiberglass Basket 	2	4	3 / 75%	5	3 / 60%	0	2 / 40%
	-Double Fiberglass Cylinders (Backes) 	2	4	3 / 75%	*3	3 / 100%	0	0
	Dismal Swamp Subtotal				17	12 / 71%	1 / 6%	4 / 24%
Schultz	-Cedar Floater 	3	4	4 / 100%	12	7 / 58%	5 / 42%	0
	-Double Cylinder onr Fiberglass Basket 	2	2	2 / 100%	5	3 / 60%	0	2 / 40%
	-Double Fiberglass Cylinders (Backes) 	2	4	3 / 75%	**5	1 / 20%	2 / 40%	2 / 40%
	Schultz Subtotal				22	11 / 50%	7 / 32%	4 / 18%
Walden	-Cedar Floater 	3	4	4 / 100%	4	3 / 75%	0	1 / 25%
	-Double Cylinder on Fiberglass Basket 	2	4	2 / 50%	3	2 / 67%	0	1 / 33%
	-Double Fiberglass Cylinders (Backes) 	2	4	2 / 50%	***2	2 / 100%	0	0
	Walden Subtotal				9	7 / 78%		2 / 22%
Totals			34	27 / 79%	48	30 / 63%	8 / 17%	10 / 21%

\* 2 of 3 nests located on top between cylinders  
 \*\* 3 of 5 nests located on top between cylinders  
 \*\*\* 1 of 2 nests located on top between cylinders



#### 4. Marsh and Waterbirds

Common loon, red-necked grebe, horned grebe, eared grebe, western grebe, pied-billed grebe, American white pelican, double-crested cormorant, great blue heron, green-backed heron, whitefaced ibis, cattle egret, great egret, black-crowned night heron, least bittern, American bittern, sandhill crane, Virginia rail, sora, yellow rail, American coot and common moorhen can be found using the District's lakes and marshes during the summer.



It doesn't get any better than this! 95-15 7/28/95 BLA

#### 5. Shorebirds, Gulls, Terns and Allied Species

Species of this category occurring within the District are: ruddy turnstone, semipalmated plover, black bellied plover, American woodcock, common snipe, upland sandpiper, spotted sandpiper, solitary sandpiper, willet, greater and lesser yellowlegs, pectoral sandpiper, Baird's sandpiper, least sandpiper, dunlin, short-billed and long-billed dowitcher, stilt sandpiper, semipalmated sandpiper, marbled godwit, Hudsonian godwit, sanderling, Wilson's phalarope; herring, ringbilled, Franklin's, Bonaparte's and Sabine's gulls; and Forster's, common, Caspian, and black terns.

The North American Woodcock Singing Ground Surveys are coordinated by the Office of Migratory Bird Management and run by individuals throughout the United States and Canada. Woodcock breeding populations are indexed through combined results of the surveys. The survey route in Pope County conducted on May 5 documented nine singing males. A second route was added but no birds were heard or seen.



## 6. Raptors

At least 26 representatives of the vulture, buteo, osprey, falcon, accipiter, and owl families have occurred within the Morris District. Turkey vulture, northern goshawk, rough-legged hawk, golden eagle, osprey, merlin, prairie falcon, peregrine falcon, and gyrfalcon pass through on migration. Hawks such as sharp-shinned, Cooper's, red-tailed, broad-winged, and Swainson's, northern harrier, bald eagle, American kestrel, and the eastern screech, great horned, barred, long-eared, short-eared, and burrowing owls have been identified as nesters. The rough-legged hawk, northern goshawk, snowy owl, and northern saw-whet owl winter in the region.

Bald eagles have been known to nest in our District. In 1995 five eaglets fledged (Section G.2).

## 7. Other Migratory Birds

Over 150 species of non-game birds occur in the Morris District. A greater effort to monitor and manage for non-game birds continued.



A ruby-throated hummingbird visits the office's "Hummingbird Garden" feeder. 95-16 8/28/95 BLA

A survey by habitat type of migratory non-game birds on selected waterfowl production areas located in the counties of Big Stone (Rothi, Thomson, and Hillman), Lac qui Parle (Florida Creek, Hastad, Hegland, and Taylor), Yellow Medicine (Dakota), Pope (Rolling Forks and Nelson Lake), Swift (Loen), and Traverse (Robinhood) continues. Sampling was conducted from June 1 to June 22. Eighty-six species were observed during the point survey. Alder flycatcher, eastern meadowlark, least bittern, red-necked grebe, ring-necked duck, and rusty blackbird were new species to the survey. Thirty-two species of neotropical migrants were found. This inventory is anticipated to last a number of years, pending funding limits, and should provide valuable information to species composition and abundance patterns in the District.

For International Migratory Bird Week a bird walk was held on May 19 for area participation. During the two hour walk, 52 species were found.

Breeding Bird Surveys are coordinated by the Office of Migratory Bird Management and run by volunteers and government personnel over the entire United States and Canada. Data gathered may be used in a database of breeding bird's occurrence and abundance. Morris WMD runs Route #065-Glenwood in Pope County. Sixty-eight species were observed during the June 6 survey. The most numerous species was the red-winged blackbird followed by common grackle.

Christmas Bird Counts are arranged by the National Audubon Society and the data is used by Office of Migratory Bird Management database. The count includes 26 WPA's within a 15 mile diameter count circle around Morris. Results from the third annual count held on December 16 include 33 species and 1,993 individuals. A blue-winged teal, common merganser, snowy owl, short-eared owl, and a flock of white-winged crossbills were new species.

#### 8. Game Mammals

For the second year in a row a mule deer was taken during the firearms deer season. They are extremely uncommon in this area.

A moose was sighted near the Benson area. There have been sightings in that area in past years. Moose are occasionally seen in western Minnesota but rarely stay long.

The Minnesota DNR reported the white-tailed deer harvest at 199,500 which is the third highest harvest on record.

A call was received about a sick white-tailed deer and its fawn. The doe had not been seen for two days and the fawn was only four days old. The fawn was captured and brought to a local Minnesota DNR Conservation Officer who routinely cares for fawns that are orphaned. The fawn died of dehydration later that same night.





Forestry Technician Beuckens cares for unfortunate fawn.  
95-17 6/6/95 CGR

Coyote sightings are becoming more common throughout the District. Sightings from landowners and staff have been reported in all seven counties.

According to Scent Post Survey results by the Minnesota DNR, the West Central zone (which includes our District) shows red fox numbers declined 16 percent, perhaps aided by several outbreaks of sarcoptic mange state-wide in 1994 and 1995. Skunks show a slight decline in our zone from last year. Raccoon indices increased 15 percent in our zone and set all time high records state-wide. It is noted that dead raccoon were common and the suspected cause, distemper, may reduce future raccoon numbers.

Minnesota DNR August Roadside Counts show the 1995 eastern cottontail index increased 31 percent statewide from 1994. This marks the first year of an increase in four years. The West Central region showed a 113 percent increase over 1994. The statewide white-tailed jackrabbit index for 1995 increased 12 percent over 1994. Although an increase in the index was recorded, white-tailed jackrabbits are rebounding from all-time low records. Only 1993 and 1994 show lower indices than 1995.

Muskrat numbers along with water levels have remained high the past couple of years as evidenced by an increased number of houses and animals observed. The high number of muskrats has helped to create openings in some previously cattail choked marshes.



# 10. Other Resident Wildlife



Tranquil scene from behind the office. 95-18 2/17/95 BLA

According to the 1994 Minnesota DNR August Roadside Wildlife Count Summary, the following was recorded:

## **Ring-Necked Pheasants**

The statewide pheasant index showed an increase for the second year in a row; 32 percent over last year and 28 percent over the five-year mean. The West Central region, which includes our entire District, showed a decrease of 12 percent over last year and 45 percent below the five-year mean. This index, for the West Central region, is the second worst on record.

## **Gray Partridge**

Statewide roadside count indices show a 22 percent decrease from last year and 6 percent below the five-year mean. The West Central region showed a 3 percent decrease over last year. This is the second lowest on record.

Several sightings of wild turkeys have been reported throughout the District. No wild turkeys were released this year by the Minnesota DNR, but plans are being made for next year.

# 11. Fisheries

In 1995, as in the past ten years, the Minnesota DNR Area Fisheries Office in Glenwood requested the use of four type V wetlands on waterfowl production areas for rearing walleye fry to fingerlings. However, only two areas were used. Netting in the fall did not produce any fingerlings. It is suspected the walleye did not survive the warm temperatures of summer.



MINNESOTA DNR FISHERIES STOCKING PROGRAM  
MORRIS WMD - 1995

<u>County</u>	<u>WPA</u>	<u>Species</u>	<u>Number of Fingerlings</u>	<u>Pounds</u>
Pope	Rolling Forks	Walleye	0	0
	Kolstad	Walleye	0	0

15. Animal Control

Beaver



Installing a Clemson Beaver Pond Leveler. 95-19 7/95 DDH

Beaver numbers are abundant as well as some of the problems they create. This year 22 beaver were removed from seven WPA's and one private land easement restoration. Our beaver exclusion devices, which are on six water control structures, are still in place and working great. There were no problems encountered at these structures. This summer we installed four more "cattle panel" exclusion devices on private land easement restoration structures. We also installed four Clemson Beaver Pond Levelers (CBPL). We will monitor these structures in the spring to observe how they stand up to ice-out. We currently have 12 "cattle panel" devices and four CBPL's in place and functioning. Of the 12 "cattle panel" devices, six are on WPA's and six on private land easement areas. Three of the CBPL's are on WPA's and one on a private land easement area.

17. Disease Prevention and Control

For the past three years an outbreak of Avian Botulism, Type C, has occurred on Mud Lake in Traverse County along the Minnesota/North Dakota border. This year South Dakota periodically monitored the wetland and no outbreak occurred.



## H. PUBLIC USE

### 1. General

With 240 WPA's spread throughout seven counties in the District it is difficult to promote the various wildlife and non-wildlife orientated recreational and other public use opportunities that exist for each individual WPA. Thus, efforts to increase the public's awareness of the environment is emphasized in areas such as the visitor center, demonstration and tour area, our environmental education programs, and news releases at Morris.



It's official. WPA's are great places to observe and enjoy the outdoors. Wetlands Field Day. 95-20 5/25/95 CGR

Plans to close part of Edwards WPA to public hunting became a local issue. The planned closed area would be around the foot trail near the headquarters. Service staff met with the opposition to explain plans and take comments. Closing of the area was put on hold until all aspects associated with the completion of the foot trail system have been finished.

### 2. Outdoor Classrooms - Students

The number of tours and programs covering a variety of topics from wildlife, wetlands and grasslands to the environment were given upon request to area students and school groups. The majority of the requests come from Morris Area School and the University of Minnesota-Morris but requests to do programs are expanding throughout the District. Close to 1,000 students were reached by this year's schedule.



Native prairie grasses was the topic of a program presented at the annual Horticulture Night held at the University of Minnesota Experiment Station.

The second grade Wetland Field Day was held on May 25. This event gives area second graders hands-on exposure to the biology, chemistry, geology, and physics of the wetland/prairie ecosystem. The all-day event provides education about the individual components of the wetland ecosystem and ends with a trip on the auto tour route to see how the individual components fit together.



Wildlife Biologist Darrell Haugen explaining wetland/water model to second graders. 95-21 5/25/95 CGR

#### 4. Interpretive Foot Trails

An observation deck accessible for people with physical disabilities was constructed in September. This deck overlooks a type IV wetland at the Morris headquarters site. Material for a bridge (50 feet long) and trail (420 feet long) leading to this deck was also purchased in September. This bridge and trail will also be accessible to people with physical disabilities. The final step is to complete a parking lot which provides accessibility to this trail and deck. Once these facilities are completed the trail system can be opened to the public. These facilities will provide a wetland and woodland experience to people with physical disabilities.



There is one existing foot trail in the Morris District. The trail on Froland WPA, Pope County, serves the communities of Benson, Starbuck, and Glenwood. The trail is approximately one mile long and is self-guided. Unfortunately, our work load prevents us from doing more than basic trail maintenance. Although both local residents and tourists use the trail, we do not know the amount of use it receives.

#### 5. Interpretive Tour Routes

The demonstration area developed in 1989 at the headquarters site has seen increasing use during the last year. The 2.5 mile gravel road through the Edwards WPA is a "show me" tour of wildlife habitat and wildlife management techniques such as: water level management, wetland restoration, grassland seedings, food plots, artificial nesting structures, nesting island, predator exclusion fence, and wildlife tree planting. The route is continuously open to the public for hiking, bicycling, or horseback riding, but is only open to vehicular traffic by special appointment or announcement.

The trail was opened to vehicular traffic on four occasions this year. It was first opened on April 21 to observe migratory waterfowl, May 15-19 for International Migratory Bird Week, and October 10-13 for National Wildlife Refuge Week. The trail was also open every Thursday during the month of September.

#### 6. Interpretive Exhibits/Demonstrations



New bald eagle display for our visitor center. Taxidermist Carl Ahrndt views the finished product. 95-22 1/10/95 BLA



A display was set up at the Morris High School for the "Big Day for Young People" event. The display included the fur and skull collection plus a number of coloring and stamp activities for the young. To promote use of nesting structures, the waterfowl nesting structure display was set up at the Ducks Unlimited meeting in February, the Minnesota Deer Hunter's meeting in March, and Prairie Pothole Days in September.

The portable display purchased in FY93 with non-game funds is used for displaying photographs of grassland and wetland birds on one side and the other side displays a variety of topics. This display can be used for off-refuge exhibits.

Our demonstration tour route was part of a tour held by the Minnesota Academy of Science on April 29.

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.



Examples of colorful, tube-shaped, nectar providing flowers are featured in the "Hummingbird Garden" demonstration area.

95-23 8/19/95 BLA



## 7. Other Interpretive Programs



Donna Rieckmann shares her passion for birds with area birders during International Migratory Bird Day.

95-24 5/19/95 BLA

The Morris Wetland office was one of the sponsors for the Natural History Series again this year. The series of environmental education programs is directed towards the entire family, both young and old. Some of the programs presented in 1995 include:

1. **Minnesota Weather: From Sun Dogs to the Dog Days of Summer.** Meteorologist, weather expert, and author Bruce Watson gave a presentation about Midwestern climatological patterns using scientific, folklore, and forecasting techniques.
2. **A Feast for our Feathered Friends.** Morris WMD Biologist Donna Rieckmann, Soil Conservationist Bernie Angus, and other local bird enthusiasts shared their expertise on feeding, planting, the best feeders, and the many pleasures of attracting birds.
3. **Our Common Critters.** Carol Schwarting, naturalist, showed a rabbit, turtles, snake, duck, opossum, and salamander providing information about each of their habitats and life cycles.
4. **Touch and See.** The display booth at the Morris Farm and Health Show had mammal hides and skulls, bird houses, and interactive posters asking questions to test the knowledge of the booth visitor.



5. **Cassiopeia, Cepheus and Castor: The Winter Constellations Fourth Annual Walk on the Prairie.** University of Minnesota-Morris instructor Gordon McIntosh provided an opportunity to observe and identify winter constellations and planets. An electronic telescope was available for observing the brilliant winter sky.
6. **Bird Watching Breakfast.** Those interested were invited to join an early morning spring bird walk in Niemackl Park followed by a pancake breakfast.
7. **Annual Walk on the Prairie.** Soil Conservationist Bernie Angus along with University of Minnesota-Morris instructors Ellen Ordway and Margaret Kuchenreuther identified native prairie species during the walk along the trail route behind the office. The late-blooming wildflowers and grasses were the highlight of the evening.

The Natural History Series is sponsored by the Morris Wetland Management District, Stevens County Soil and Water Conservation District, University of Minnesota-Morris Division of Education and Department of Biology, Morris Area Chamber of Commerce, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Advanced Hunter Education, U.S. Department of Agriculture Soil Research Service, Morris Area Community Education, Minnesota Extension Service, Girl Scouts, Pheasants Forever, and University of Minnesota Conferences.

8. Hunting

The diversity of WPA's in the Morris District offers different options to the hunter.



Ducks in flight over Artichoke Lake WPA. 95-25 6/16/95 BLA

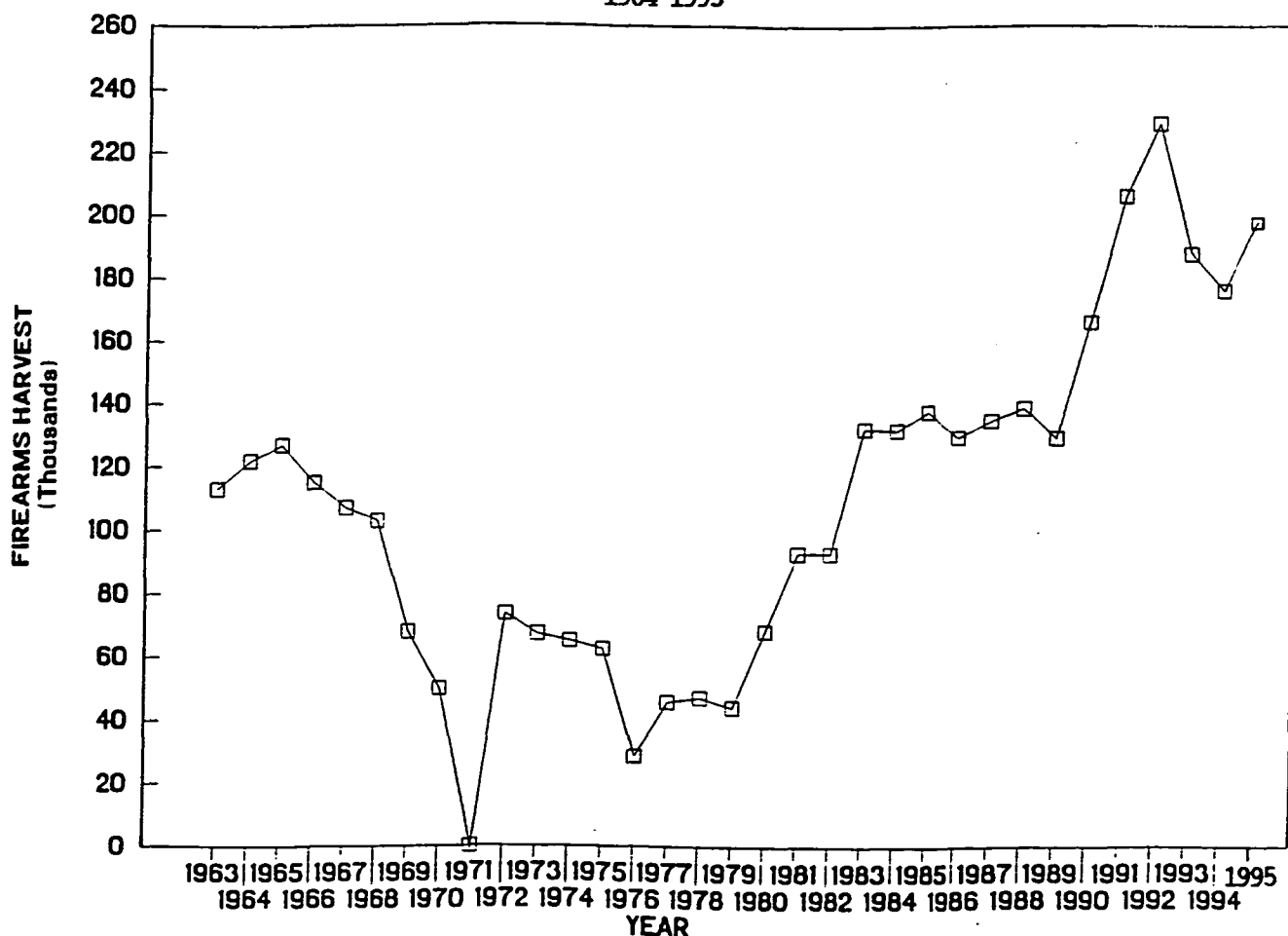


Waterfowl hunting was good over the District. Given the option from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the State of Minnesota selected the longer 50 day season and a five duck daily bag limit. The open season date for ducks, coots, and mergansers was September 30 - November 18. The early Canada goose season, which included most of our District, was open from September 2-11. The daily bag limit was two Canada geese. This early goose season targets the local population of giant Canada geese. The area included in this early season and the bag limits set are due in part to the depredation complaints which are received. The regular Canada goose season was September 30 - November 8 which had a daily bag limit of one.

Firearm, bow hunters, and muzzleloaders registered 910 deer in Stevens County during the 1995 hunting season. This is down about 8 percent from 1994. Minnesota DNR Area Wildlife Manager Kevin Kotts noted that the deer season in his work area appears to have been affected by the late crop harvest. Deer registration was down slightly in counties that had a large amount of standing corn. Western Minnesota, which includes our District, showed a 10 percent increase in harvest of antlerless deer, likely the result of a very good fawn crop after last year's mild winter. Statewide, the 1995 firearms deer harvest totalled 199,500 deer, the third highest harvest ever recorded.

## FIREARMS DEER HARVEST

1964-1995



## 9. Fishing

Although good fishing opportunities abound within the Morris Wetland District's seven county area, minimal fishing resources exist on WPA's. Two units, Artichoke WPA (Big Stone County), and Heidebrink WPA (Pope County), offer the best fishing opportunities. Shoreline fishing along Artichoke Lake could result in northern pike, walleye, crappie, and blue-gill catches. During the spring months northern pike can be found along a section of the Chippewa River that runs through Heidebrink WPA.

## 10. Trapping

For the second year red fox and raccoon were opened to trapping and hunting year around. According to a local fur buyer, fur prices remained similar to last year. Trapping data for specific species is not available. The Minnesota Predator/Furbearer Scent Post Survey (Section D.5) shows furbearers within our District remaining at high levels.

## 11. Wildlife Observation

As WPA's 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 WPA's. Because of the lack of good habitat in the surrounding areas, migratory and resident birds tend to concentrate on the units 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 WPA's. 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 WPA.

## 17. Law Enforcement

Two people on the Morris staff had law enforcement authority during the year; they were Officers Lewis and Raitz.

Most enforcement activities are associated with wetland drainage violations or resolving WPA problems. Citations are seldom used in resolving these problems but the training and the authority to arrest or cite an individual are essential assets in these contacts. State Conservation Officers have primary responsibility for hunting season enforcement. We maintain good rapport with these State Officers and work cooperatively during waterfowl season and upon request in other situations.

## I. EQUIPMENT AND FACILITIES

### 1. New Construction

#### **Spellman Lake WPA**

This WPA, located in Yellow Medicine County, had a total of five drained basins restored. Two small basins (1.7 acre and 1 acre) were restored with ditch plugs and another 4 acre basin by a tile break. The two large basins entailed more work. They had originally been drained by a tile line which led to a pit with two pumps. The pumps were removed, pit filled, a 300 foot dike was constructed on the north edge of the north basin, 750 feet of spillway ditch was dug between the basins, and a spill pipe installed. This resulted in the restoration of a 21 acre marsh and a 26 acre marsh.

#### **Overlook**



The entire Morris WMD staff (except the clerk) assisted in pouring cement for the footings of the new overlook.

95-26 9/19/95 BLA

Thanks to a donor who wishes to remain anonymous, the construction of a fully accessible overlook was completed adjacent to the marsh southwest of the office along the nature trail. Eighty-five percent of the materials were purchased with the donated funds. The remainder of the materials and construction was completed by force account.





A class from the University of Minnesota, Morris, on the completed overlook. 95-27 10/19/95 BLA

#### **OSHA Compliance**

Two sets of metal prefabricated stairways were purchased for the shop. The stairways were installed by District personnel. These stairways provide a safe access to two mezzanine storage areas which had previously been accessible only by stepladder.

## **2. Rehabilitation**

### **Building Site - Spellman Lake WPA**

This was the first building site cleaned up that was also a known archaeological site. The house, barn, and garage had been sold by sealed bid and moved off the site. Three small wood structures were not bid on and remained. They were moved a short distance off the archaeological sensitive area and burned in a pit. Dirt from the wetland restoration project was hauled to the building site to fill the house basement and to provide over three feet of fill over the concrete floors of the garage and barn. Hauling dirt into the site was recommended to cause the least disturbance while restoring the site to nesting cover.

### **Metal Doors**

The east metal door of the office and the metal personnel door to the shop were replaced as the original doors had holes rusted through them.

### **Water Pressure Tank**

Due to rust problems, the original pressure tank for the head-quarter's water system was replaced with a tank that has a rubber bladder.



**Ditch Plug Repairs**

Three WPA's had ditch plugs repaired this year.

- Wente WPA, Stevens County - Rebuilt to higher elevation due to a leak.
- Pieske WPA, Stevens County - Two plugs were rebuilt due to beaver damage.
- Pepperton WPA, Stevens County - Corrected spillway elevation.

**3. Major Maintenance**

A \$2,463.17 repair to the hydraulic system of the TW-10 Ford tractor was the only major repair of the year.

**4. Equipment Utilization and Replacement****Vehicles - Pickup**

A 3/4 ton Ford pickup ordered in 1994 to replace a 1986 Dodge pickup arrived in April. Two additional pickups were ordered at the end of FY95, one with station funds and the other with Regional Office end-of-year funds.

A 4 x 4 ATV was also purchased this year.

**5. Communications Systems**

The headquarters area was the lucky recipient of two lightning strikes in mid-summer. The first, about July 4, destroyed the shop phone, burned up the relay for the remote bell system, destroyed the radio remote control in the shop, shut down the office phone system because of seven or eight burned fuses, and destroyed the electric protector for the phone system. The electronic weather station at the office also received damage to sending units and the control box. Most items were repaired in three to ten days. The weather station, however, was not operational until early 1996.

The second strike in late July did less damage because the phone company had added another electric protector in the shop. The damage from this strike was the shop radio remote and two electric protectors.

This was the second year in a row that the phone and radio system received major damage due to a summer thunderstorm.

**6. Computer Systems**

No new computer equipment was purchased in 1995.

**7. Energy Conservation**

Replacement of the station's boilers in 1983 with new, high efficiency propane boilers has saved energy and reduced costs. The system continues to operate with no problems and, best of all, the office now maintains a constant temperature.

## J. OTHER ITEMS

3. Items of Interest

## REVENUE SHARING PAYMENTS - MORRIS WMD

<u>County</u>	<u>FY93</u>	<u>FY94</u>	<u>FY95</u>
Big Stone	\$22,619	\$22,398	\$ *
Lac qui Parle	6,544	6,481	
Pope	29,713	29,423	
Stevens	27,032	26,768	
Swift	22,588	22,934	
Traverse	11,924	11,808	
Yellow Medicine	<u>3,263</u>	<u>3,231</u>	
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$123,683</b>	<b>\$123,043</b>	

\*Payments for 1995 have not been received at this time.

Revenue sharing payments are important to our acquisition program. The county commissioners are always interested in the percentage of the calculated annual payment their counties receive. The reduced payments are now causing the slowdown of acquisition in several counties in Minnesota. Big Stone, Swift, and Pope Counties will probably not certify additional fee tracts until 100 percent payments are received.



Wetland Manager Al Radtke was awarded the Minnesota Waterfowl Association's 1994 Conservationist of the Year-Professional Award in February. 95-28 2/22/95 BLA





Goodbye Mo! Enjoy Wisconsin. 95-29 4/12/95 BLA

#### 4. Credits

The following staff members contributed to this report.

Angus:	B, F (1-12), G (1-7), H (4-5).
Bober:	E (1-6), I, J (1-2).
Raitz:	E (7), G (8-17), H (8-16), editing.
Ellis:	G (8-17), H (8-16).
Lewis:	F (13,15), G (3), H (17).
Radtke:	A, C, J (3-4).
Haugen:	F (15).
Henderson:	F (15).
Rieckmann:	D, G (1-7), H (1-2, 6-7).
Stettner:	I (6), all typing and assembly of report.



We're still having fun!