HABITAT PAYS BREAKS NEW GROUND

BY EMILY KIEL, COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER

What do South Dakota hunters and farmers have in common? A lot, including a passion for the land and a love for tradition.

That is why the South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks is teaming up with the South Dakota Department of Agriculture on the new Habitat Pays campaign, which targets landowners.

Habitat Pays connects farmers and ranchers with the tools to help them develop and maintain wildlife habitat in ways that make sense on their land.

"Habitat conservation is important in South Dakota. Through these efforts, we conserve our land, enhance our wildlife population and preserve our outdoor traditions," Governor Daugaard said. "I commend the departments of Agriculture and Game, Fish and Parks for finding common ground and working together on this issue."

HABITAT ADVISORS

Habitat advisors can provide a critical link between producers and habitat and conservation programs. These individuals are available to help landowners develop a statewide plan and implement strategies on their property. In addition to assisting farmers and ranchers who wish to assess their land for habitat or enhance existing habitat, they can help producers choose from the wide array of incentive programs.

Emmett Lenihan	**Aberdeen**
Mary Beth Albrechtsen	**Belle Fourche**
Eric Magedanz	**Brookings**
Jim Ristau	**Chamberlain**
Brandon Boehm	**Gettysburg**
Matt Grunig	**Huron**
Brian Pauly	**Huron**
Mike Blaalid	**Mitchell**
Mark Norton	**Pierre**
Tim Olson	**Pierre**
Cody Grewing	**Rapid City**
Sam Fryman	**Redfield**
Ben Lardy	**Webster**
Nolan Benzing	**Winner**
Tom Rohlck	**Woonsocket**

HOW IT STARTED

In December 2013, Governor Daugaard hosted a Pheasant Habitat Summit. Hundreds of stakeholders gathered in Huron to learn more about the condition of South Dakota's habitat through presentations and discussions from key leaders throughout the state.

Following the summit, Governor Daugaard formed a habitat work group. He charged members with developing recommendations focused on practical solutions for maintaining and improving pheasant habitat compatible with agriculture production.

The 13-member group met regularly, reviewing survey results, scientific data, letters and suggestions, and released a report in September 2014. This report is available at *habitat.sd.gov.*

"The work group represented a variety of different interests, so our collaboration began early on," said South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks Secretary Kelly Hepler. The group included sportsmen and women, landowners, leading conservation and agriculture academics, legislators and government officials.

One of the group's recommendations was to create an awareness campaign to connect landowners with the many resources available for establishing habitat on their land. Another recommendation was to implement a website specific to habitat management with information on federal, state, local and non-government programs for landowners to learn about and access when appropriate. Together these recommendations became Habitat Pays.

>>

PARTNERING WITH AGRICULTURE

"South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks' understands working with agriculture, and specifically the South Dakota Department of Agriculture, is key to the success of Habitat Pays. Agriculture is the state's number one industry, with a $25.6 billion economic impact," Hepler noted. "Truly understanding the farmer's point of view is a critical component for success."

South Dakota Department of Agriculture Secretary Lucas Lentsch agrees. "Farmers and ranchers know what is best for their land and their operation. With Habitat Pays, we want to help landowners find the right programs to help them meet their personal land use goals."

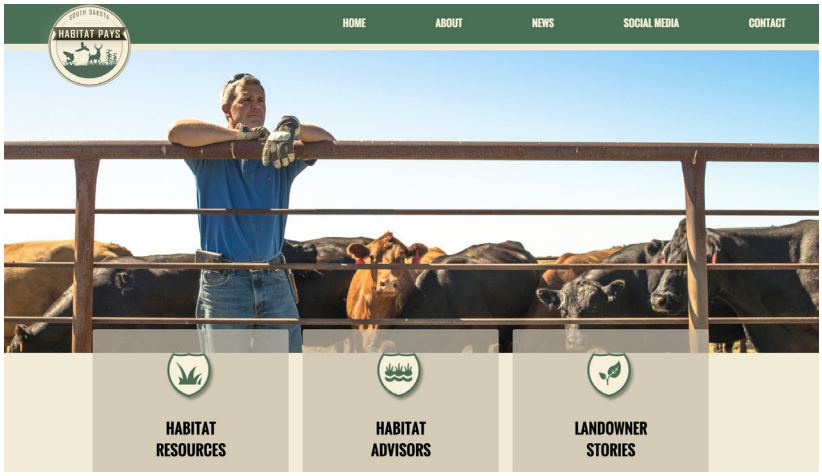
The two departments are working together to meet with agribusinesses, commodity organizations, cooperatives and producers to discuss ways to foster collaboration, improve communication and achieve mutually beneficial outcomes.

HABITAT.SD.GOV

"The newly developed Habitat Pays website is a great resource for the farmers and ranchers of South Dakota," said Secretary Hepler. "We invite everyone to check it out."

Videos on the site feature stories of landowners in various parts of the state who have taken advantage of programs to maintain or establish habitat.

The site includes a comprehensive list of resources, along with a list of habitat advisors who are experts in conservation programs and habitat planning. They possess the knowledge of federal, state and local programs to assist landowners in finding the right program or programs to meet their personal habitat and land use goals. Habitat advisors are available to assist landowners in designing, developing and funding habitat improvements on private lands. Background information, images and contact information for each of the habitat advisors is available on the website so landowners can put a name and a face together.



WITHOUT THE SUPPORT OF THESE LANDOWNERS, MUCH OF THE ABUNDANT WILDLIFE HABITAT WE ENJOY WOULD NOT EXIST.
—SECRETARY HEPLER—

"It's a way of connecting with farmers and ranchers and helping them implement wildlife habitat where it makes sense to do so," said Secretary Hepler.

"Every operation is different, presenting different needs and challenges. Especially with the recent market changes, producers are looking for ways to make every acre pay. In some cases, input costs can run higher than the value of the crop grown on that ground," Secretary Lentsch said. "In cases like these, it can make a lot of sense for producers to look at putting those acres into habitat."

Turning land into habitat can improve soil health and increase land values. Plus, a wide variety of financial incentives are available for landowners.

"There are many programs run through the federal government, state government and private organizations that provide cost-share and technical assistance to producers looking to establish or maintain habitat acres on their land. The complexity of navigating the large number of habitat programs can be overwhelming for landowners to know which of the many programs best meet their specific needs," said Secretary Lentsch.

That is where the habitat advisors come in (see page 10).

SPREAD THE WORD

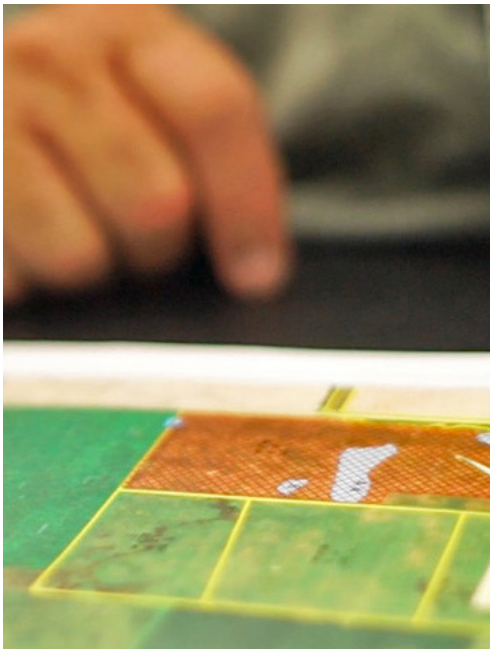
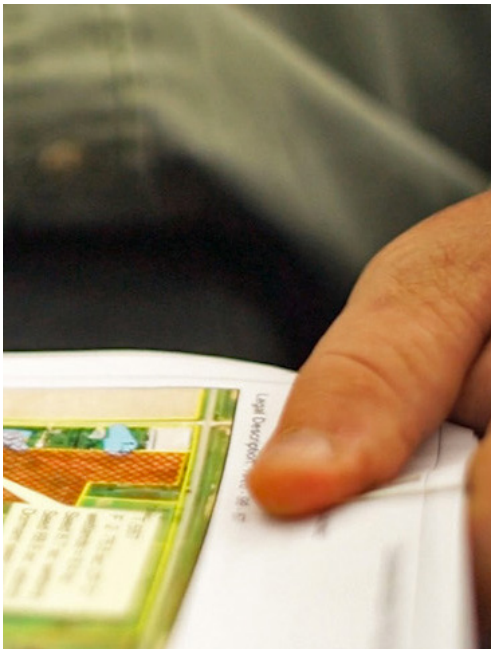
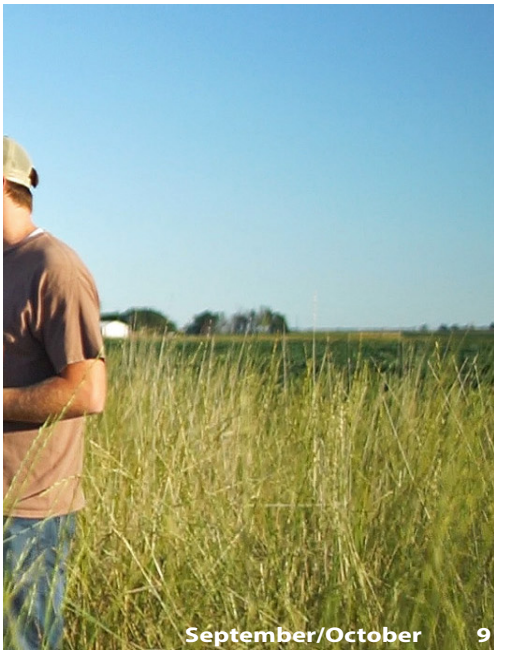
Habitat Pays relies on farmers and ranchers to promote the program through word of mouth.

"Together, we hope to conserve, manage, protect and enhance South Dakota's wildlife resources – while respecting the important role of landowners and our need for them to remain economically viable and productive," said Secretary Lentsch.

"Habitat Pays provides landowners with the resources and financial incentives they need to achieve their individual habitat development goals. Habitat truly does pay because of opportunities for improved soil health, increased land value and abundant wildlife for all South Dakotans," concluded Secretary Hepler. ■

RESOURCES FOR LANDOWNERS

Dozens of federal, state and non-governmental programs are available to help landowners establish or maintain habitat.

Assistance is provided in the form of funding, resources and expertise. See full descriptions of these types of habitat programs online at *habitat.sd.gov.*

- Grassland Habitat
- Wetland Habitat
- Woody Habitat
- Food Plots
- Wildlife Habitat Management
- Hunting Access Programs
- Watershed Protection
- Forestry Programs
- Resource Conservation
- Other Habitat Practices