NATURALHERITAGE

PRIVATE LANDS HABITAT AND ACCESS PROGRAMS

BY CASEY ARCHIBALD, EDITOR

South Dakota is fortunate to have diverse and abundant wildlife resources. Since the majority of South Dakota lands are privately owned; farmers, ranchers and other private landowners are the most important stewards of our wildlife resources and the habitats they depend on. At the same time, South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks (GFP) is charged with managing South Dakota's public wildlife resources for everyone's use, benefit and enjoyment.

GFP will continue to adapt its initiatives, programs and incentives to the changing needs of South Dakota landowners, citizens and visitors.

LAND MANAGEMENT APPROACH

South Dakota has a variety of landscapes divided into the following four ecoregions: Black Hills, Great Plains Steppe, Missouri River and Eastern Prairie.

Ecoregions are areas with similar physical and biological attributes, each comprised of interacting ecosystems with varying biological communities. This approach recognizes the distinct characteristics of each ecoregion and the need to be adaptive with program development and delivery.

PRIVATE LANDS HABITAT AND ACCESS PROGRAMS

Dating back to the mid-1970's, GFP has offered an evolving suite of voluntary private land habitat programs to cooperating landowners. These habitat programs have been adapted to complement opportunities offered by federal Farm Bill programs and to better meet the needs of private landowners who desire to establish and enhance wildlife habitat.

The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) not only has provided the foundation for GFP's Walk-In Area Program, but many of GFP's habitat programs are carefully designed to complement and enhance the wildlife benefits of CRP.

TWO MAIN GOALS

The scope of the private lands habitat and access programs are defined by two distinct goals.

GOAL #1

In cooperation with private landowners, GFP private lands biologists work to manage, conserve and restore habitat in an effort to sustain diverse wildlife populations.

GOAL #2

Provide the public with high quality opportunities to access fish and wildlife resources on private land.

For each goal, statewide and ecoregion specific objectives and strategies have been established to guide program implementation.

Achieving these goals requires strong partnerships between GFP and local, state, federal and non-governmental organizations. Most importantly, is the support and cooperation of South Dakota landowners and informed individuals who understand the value of South Dakota's native habitats and the wildlife species who depend on them. This will ensure continued habitat and access success on private lands throughout South Dakota.

To learn more, visit *habitat.sd.gov.*