

65,000 Soil Cooperators Aid In Preservation Of Wildlife

Sixty-five thousand Soil Conservation District cooperators are making a real contribution to the improvement of lands suitable for maintenance and increase of wildlife populations, Frank H. Mendell, state conservationist of U. S. Soil Conservation Service, said.

Iowa farmers hold the key to successful wildlife crops in the years ahead. This is true because more than 90 percent of our potential hunting land is in private ownership or control.

Our wildlife crop, says Mendell, is produced and harvested on lands that are used for cultivation, livestock, or wood products. Only a small amount of land, mainly in public owned refuges and shooting grounds, is used exclusively for wildlife.

Since our wildlife is produced on lands used primarily for agricultural purposes, the success of wildlife production depends on how farmers and ranchers use and treat land.

List Installations

Mendell, in reviewing the past 25 year record of progress by soil conservation district cooperators, shows installation of the following soil and water conservation having a direct benefit to wildlife:

Hedgerow plantings, 300,000 rods; tree planting, 9,000 acres; wildlife area improvement, 38,000 acres; farm ponds constructed, 20,550; fish ponds improved, 11,000; waterways developed, 106,000.

According to Mendell, a number of state and federal agencies have and are providing considerable assistance to Iowa farmers in applying these conservation practices. Technical assistance is provided by the Soil Conservation Service, State Extension Service, State Soil Conservation Committee, State Conservation Commission, and the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The latter two agencies also make tree and shrub planting stock available for wildlife planting and fish for stocking of farm fish ponds.

Of material aid to farm cooperators is the cost sharing program of ACP as administered by local Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation committees. The Izaak Walton League and conservation sportsmans' groups have done much to facilitate the above programs.

Other significant practices installed by Iowa's soil conservation district cooperators are as follows: 315,800 acres of pasture planting, 2,600 miles of diversion terraces, 268,000 acres of strip cropping, 3,800 drop inlet structures, 930 drop spillway structures, 37,000 miles of terracing.

The 300,000 rods of hedgerows, of honeysuckle and multiflora rose, established on or across farm fields furnish food, cover, nesting places, and travel lanes and enables wildlife to make better use of farm lands. Many songbird nests are found in these hedges. Sometimes as many as two or more nests per rod are found. Hedgerows furnish food during much of the winter when snow storms may cover up other food.

Add To Water Area

The 38,000 acres of land reported as improved for wildlife includes areas planted, seeded or protected for wildlife purposes. Even so-called waste or idle land has frequently been made much more liveable for wildlife by the simple addition of small thickets, clumps of evergreens, or seedings of grasses and le-

gumes, Mendell explained.

The more than 20,000 farm ponds which have been built on farms of soil conservation district cooperators represent a significant addition to the water area of Iowa. Farm ponds constructed during the past few years average about one surface acre of water per pond.

Most ponds are completely fenced from livestock with many of them improved as wildlife areas by shrub and evergreen plantings. Most have been stocked with fish — bass, bluegill and sometimes channel catfish. Fishing is excellent in the well managed ponds. There is a growing awareness of many Iowans to the possibilities of this relatively new recreational resource.

Waterfowl are quick to take advantage of these newly established water areas and they may be found using them during both fall and spring migrations.

Family-Sized Lakes

Incidentally, Mendell added, many farmers have improved the areas around their ponds as family - sized recreational spots. Such areas are provided with shelters, picnic tables, fireplaces, and tree and shrub plantings. Some farmers have provided sand beaches around the pond for bathing.

The 106,000 acres of waterways installed consist largely of stands of suitable grasses which have been established in draws and water courses which were formerly eroding gullies. Such improved grassed waterways serve as good wildlife travel lanes, escape cover, and along the edges, ground nesting birds may make their nests.

The more than 267,000 acres of strip cropping means that alternate strips of meadow and clean-tilled crops will provide variable kinds of cover and travel lanes across field slopes.