



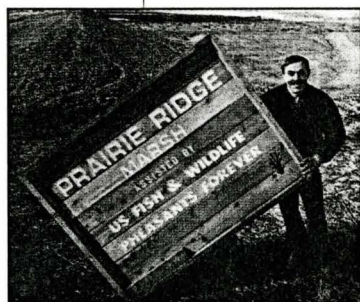
S P O T L I G H T O N H A B I T A T

By Matt O'Connor, Regional Wildlife Biologist

The Beauty of Wetlands

My good hunting buddy Ken Thorton convinced me just after Christmas in 1982 how important wetland habitat could be for pheasants. North Iowa in the early 1980s had miserable low numbers of pheasants.

I remember conducting August roadside brood



surveys and seeing one brood and one adult rooster over the 30 mile route, and feeling happy I saw any. So naturally, I laughed and declined the invitation for a late-season hunt across the frozen tundra of northwest

Iowa. I wasn't laughing a

week later when Ken stopped by on his way home with a possession limit of birds.

"There's nothing better than hunting the cat-tails, and I didn't break through once this year."

Ken was happy and I was sold on wetlands. I have been preaching the wetland gospel ever since.

Wetlands are a valuable asset to the landscape. Wildlife, soil and agricultural agencies are doing a great job of "selling" the value of wetlands. Pheasants Forever chapters are doing their part in helping to cost-share the restoration or enhancement of wetland habitats. In 1995, Pheasants Forever chapters spent \$852,027 on 205 wetland projects, restoring 4,990 acres. It is obvious that Pheasants Forever committees understand the value of wetlands.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service has produced several booklets on wetland values. Here is a refresher course on the importance of wetlands:

Water quality. Wetlands are a large biological sponge; their power to clean and act as a natural pollution control is well known. They are effective in removing agricultural chemicals and nutrients. Research results vary, but it seems that a wetland as small as half to a full acre can

effectively filter out the excess nitrogen runoff from a 100-acre cornfield. Some communities and farms are now using wetlands as an effective alternative for sewage and animal waste treatment. Wetlands filter and collect sediment from runoff water, helping prevent mud from clogging lakes and reservoirs farther downstream.

Reduce flooding and soil erosion. Wetlands along rivers and streams can act as temporary holding basins for excess rain water. The wetland "sponge" allows the water to percolate into the ground or evaporate. This storage helps reduce peak water flow during floods.

By slowing the overland flow of water, wetlands reduce soil erosion downstream. This is easy to observe. After the next heavy rain, go look at the outlet of a marsh near your home, then find a drainage ditch and compare the water.

Habitat for wildlife. Wetlands are prime habitat for breeding, nesting, feeding and cover for invertebrates, insects, amphibians, reptiles, water-

PF chapters are helping to preserve wetlands by cost-sharing their restoration and enhancement.