



It might not look like much now, but this piece of Iowa is well on its way to becoming a productive wetland.

fowl, songbirds, and mammals. Up to two-thirds of America's wild ducks are hatched on prairie pothole marshes. Wetlands in the United States support about 5,000 plant species, 190 species of amphibians, and a third of all native bird species.

PHEASANTS AND WETLANDS

Research has found winter pheasant densities as high as 300 birds per square mile near well-managed wetlands. Dense stands of cattails cannot be flattened by even the heaviest of snow, and cattails act as natural insulation for roosting birds. Good upland grass cover around the wetland creates an even better overall habitat area by providing nesting cover. Todd Bogenschutz, Iowa DNR Upland Wildlife Specialist, offers this advice on wetlands and upland cover: "Dense cattails are excellent winter cover for pheasants, and locating prime nesting habitat next to cattails is very important. Pheasants will not have to move far to find nesting sites in the spring. Less movement by pheasants in the winter and early spring means less loss to late season blizzards and less predation. A good ratio to follow when establishing upland grass cover next to wetlands is three acres of grass to one acre of wetland."

ATTITUDES CHANGE

What used to be "that no-good *!#! swamp" has started to change. The change is incomplete, but each year more is learned and more information published about the importance and values of wetlands. Agencies have learned to "engineer" a better wetland that allows outlet water to return

directly back into the tile system so downstream drainage is not effected. Better water control structures reduce upstream drainage problems. The Conservation Reserve Program and Wetland Reserve Program have allowed landowners the opportunity to restore wetlands. Those landowners and friends have seen first-hand the great wildlife habitat the marsh creates. What was once a "#@\$%! swamp" to great-granddad is becoming a "darn nice wetland" to a great grandchild.

One case from Iowa

Bob Boeck wanted a marsh. The firefighter from Waterloo, Iowa, had tried for three years to sign up for the Wetland Reserve Program. Unfortunately, the sight was rejected each time or the program had run out of money. In spring 1995, Bob turned to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Blackhawk County Pheasants Forever. Those two sources came up with 75 percent of the cost of building the dike. Boeck explains simply: "I provide the place and they provide the dollars. It's a great partnership." In September the work began and was completed in just over three days. "It didn't look like much; actually, it was quite a mess, kind of a moonscape with puddles," remembers Bob. The dry fall of 1995 never produced enough water to fill the wetland. The spring of 1996 has started out dry and Bob is patiently waiting for his wetland to fill. In the meantime the 30 acres of wetlands have been finally accepted in the Wetland Reserve Program. Even with just a small puddle for water in the marsh Bob is surprised at the change: "Incredible, there is no other way to describe it. Shore birds and a few ducks showed up immediately. Even with the main basin being not much more than a mud flat this spring, there are already some wetland plants showing up. All I need is a good 3- or 4-inch rain."

Bob Boeck's 20-acre wetland is surrounded by 60 acres of big bluestem, switchgrass and Indian grass. He has two corn food/cover plots.

"This was a great wildlife area in the past, but thanks to Pheasants Forever and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, it's even better than I ever hoped," says Boeck.