

**Rainwater Basin Joint Venture
Final Grant Report
Nebraska Game and Parks
Commission
State Wildlife Grant
Working Lands Initiative
Grant # SWG WLI T81HM1**





Introduction and Grant Overview

In 2010, the Rainwater Basin Joint Venture (RWBJV) embraced three new initiatives with an overarching goal to increase habitat quality of remaining Rainwater Basin wetlands. These initiatives included the “Working Lands Initiative”, “Watershed Restoration Initiative”, and “Invasive Species Management Initiative”.

The overarching goal of the “Working Lands Initiative” is to provide a catalyst to expand grazing of wetlands in the Rainwater Basin (RWB). The RWBJV partners believe establishing multiple local demonstration sites will showcase and increase awareness of grazing opportunities in the RWB. These demonstration sites will highlight that wetlands can be an economically viable component of a producer’s operation and provide optimal habitat conditions for waterfowl, shorebirds, and whooping cranes.

This grant provided funding to support the “Working Lands Initiative”. The main objective of this grant was to establish necessary infrastructure (perimeter fence, cross fence, livestock water) on 160 acres of RWB wetlands and associated uplands to transition idled wetland acres into local producers operation and increase the habitat value of those acres.

The RWBJV partners have used state of the art technology and planning tools to identify landowners of flood prone cropland and idled wetlands dominated by late successional vegetation communities (Bulrush (*Schoenoplectus Spp.*), Cattail (*Typha Spp.*), reed canary grass (*Phalaris Spp.*)). Using these tools private Lands biologists contacted numerous landowners. No one wetland or farm operation is identical so each of these projects were customized to “fit” the farm operation and maximize the habitat benefits. This ensured the win-win scenario, where the producer was able to more effectively integrate wetland acres into their operation and promote optimal habitat conditions for target species.

The RWBJV partners have completed the initial phase of this grant and developed infrastructure to support grazing as a management tool on 204 acres of RWB wetlands, 44 acres above the project goal.

The RWBJV will be conducting three landowner tours this fall, after harvest. One Tour will be in the Southeastern Rainwater Basins near Fairfield Nebraska, one will be in the Northeastern RWB highlighting Marsh Duck Wildlife Management Area and the Neil Nabor project, and one will be in the Western Basins highlighting the Jackobsen/Ericksen projects as well as grazing at Funk Waterfowl Production Area.

These tours will be facilitated by members from the Nebraska Cattlemen and the Sand County Foundation. Facilitated meetings will help to ensure that biologists, project participants, and interested landowners will be able to have open discussions about project successes and opportunities to make these projects more successful in the future. Field trips after the first year of grazing will allow producers to provide firsthand details on the successful elements as well as those that could be refined in the future.

Project Details

Funds from this grant were leveraged to fund three different projects; 1) Jacobsen, 2) Erickson, and the 3) Nabor Wetland. These projects provided infrastructure to support grazing on two entire wetland basins.

Bart Jacobson/Kevin Ericson Projects

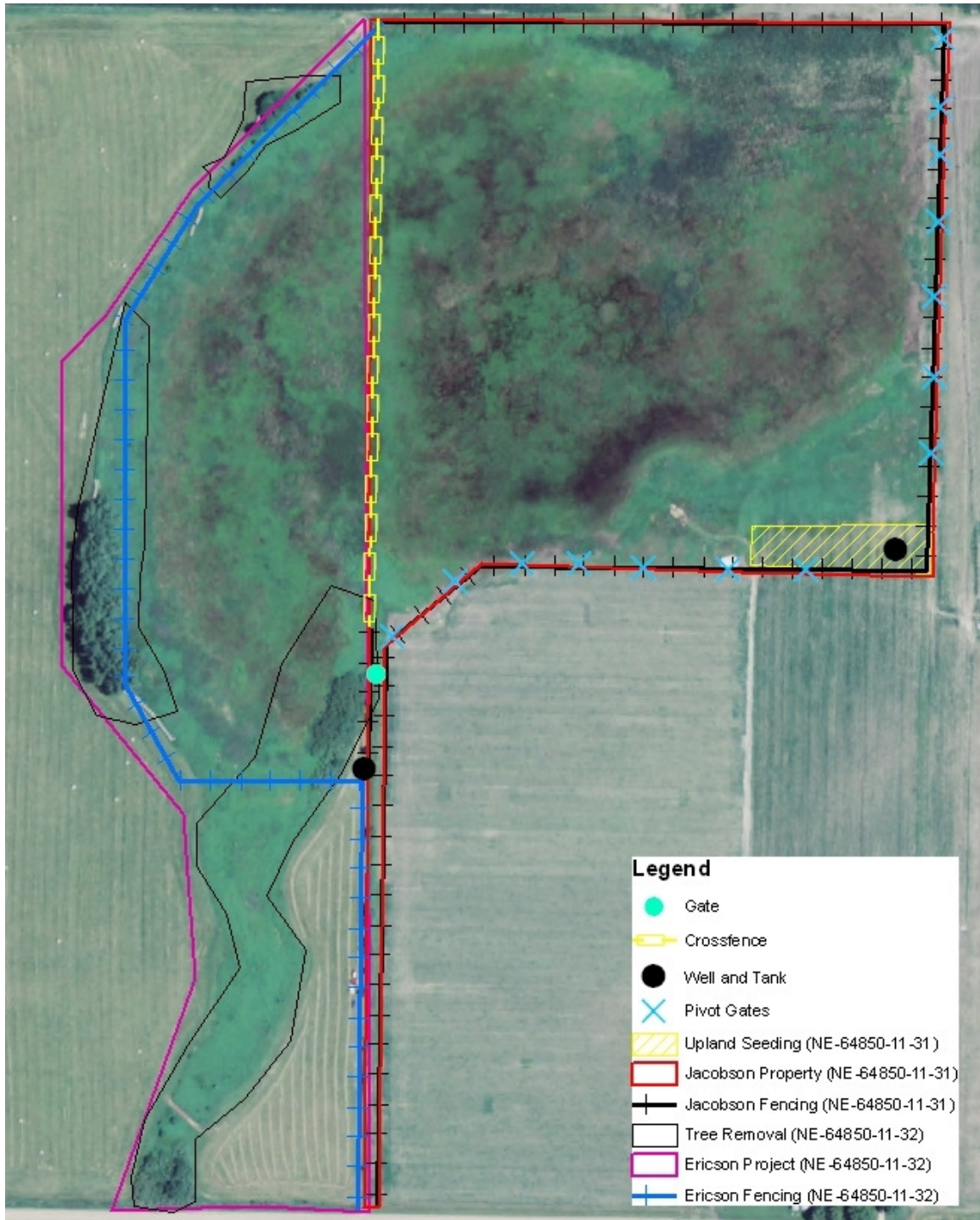
Bart Jacobsen and Kevin Erickson share ownership of this 62 acre wetland basin in Phelps County. This seasonal wetland is roughly three miles from Funk Waterfowl Production Area. This area of Phelps County has a high density of wetlands and functions as a wetland complex. Waterfowl, waterbirds, and shorebirds have been shown to select for landscapes, like this, with a high density of wetlands.

The local and landscape habitat characteristics of this wetland are such, that there is a high probability it will be used by Whooping Cranes. This wetland is centrally located in the migration corridor and is situated in the middle of the section, away from roads and other disturbance features.

Elements of this project included tree removal to increase habitat quality, installation of a perimeter fence, cross fence along the property boundary, reestablishing an upland

buffer, and drilling two solar wells so each landowner has access to livestock water for their portion of the wetland.

This project is a great example of how the RWBJV partners are able to work with multiple producers to develop projects that ensure the wetland and project will fit in their operations.



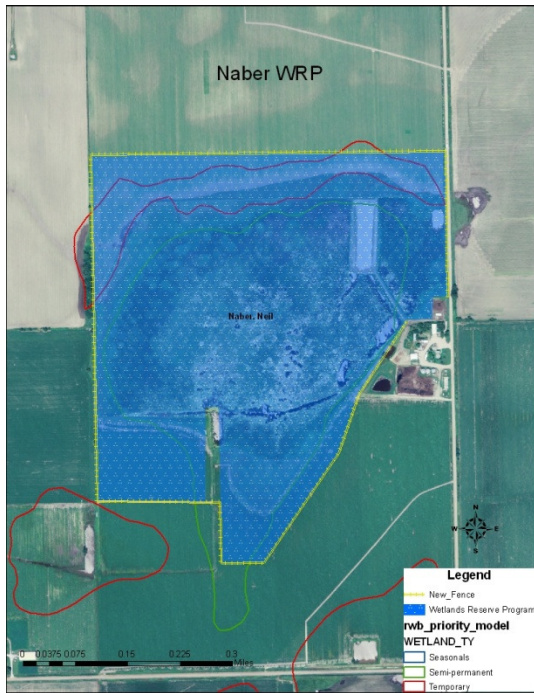
Naber Wetland Project

The Neil Naber wetland is a 142 acre wetland in York County. This semi-permanent wetland is roughly a mile from Marsh Duck Wildlife Management area. This area of York County also has a very high density of high density of wetlands with multiple under public ownership.

The local and landscape habitat characteristics of this wetland are characteristic of wetlands that are selected for buff-breasted sandpipers. This wetland is centrally located in the buff-breasted sandpiper migration corridor. While in the Rainwater Basin Buff-breasted sandpipers spend a significant amount of time foraging in croplands, visiting the wetlands as a source of water and courtship activities. Grazing will promote early successional vegetation communities, shallow open water, and mudflats. This type of habitat is ideal shorebird habitat.

Elements of this project included installation of a perimeter fence, cross fence along the Wetlands Reserve Program easement boundary.

This project is a great example of how the RWBJV partners are able to develop infrastructure on properties enrolled in the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) to ensure future management. Management of these properties is critical, since there are nearly 100 WRP easements in the RWB and these properties prove nearly 20% of the available foraging resources.



Summary

The projects funded by this grant have been very successful. In total, 204 acres of wetlands and associated uplands now have necessary infrastructure to support grazing. Grazing will ensure these wetlands will not be dominated by undesired late successional vegetation communities and more importantly are viewed by their owners as an economically viable element of their operation. These projects highlight the true win-win opportunities that exist in conservation and agriculture.

Grazing these sites will promote desired habitat conditions for several priority species including whooping cranes, buff-breasted sandpipers, as well as promote optimal foraging habitat for the millions of waterfowl and thousands of shorebirds that depend on the RWB during migration.

The Rainwater Basin Joint Venture partners involved in this project exceeded project goals by nearly 30% enrolling 44 acres above the projected goal of 160 acres. The partners leveraged Nebraska Game and Parks Commission State Wildlife Grant dollars with significant matching non-federal funds and other contributions from federal partners to complete these projects. The \$15,000 from the State Wildlife Grant was matched with \$21,916.01 in non-federal funds with an additional \$18,236.33 of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service funds contributed to elements of projects. Total project costs were \$61,489.49. State Wildlife Grant funds were leveraged 4.1:1 or for every State Wildlife Grant dollar the RWBJV partners leveraged just over four dollars to complete these projects.

Funding Table

State Wildlife Grant: A Working Lands Initiative to Support Management of RWB Wetlands T-81-HM-1							
	FWS	LO	NGPC	JV NET	JV SWG	Project Totals	Acres
Ericson	7,001.84	750.00	5,866.01	2,625.00	2,625.00	18,867.85	29.00
Jacobson	6,699.99	0.00	6,329.15	3,393.75	3,093.75	19,516.64	33.00
Naber	4,465.95	2,286.85	3,417.22	3,417.23	9,281.25	22,868.50	142.00
						0.00	
	18,167.78	3,036.85	15,612.38	9,435.98	15,000.00	\$ 61,252.99	204.00
	FWS Contribution Not Match		*\$6,329.15 used as match to NGPC NET Grant				

Match Table			
Land Owner	NGPC	JV NET	Total Non-Federal Match
3,036.85	9,283.23	9,435.98	\$ 21,756.06