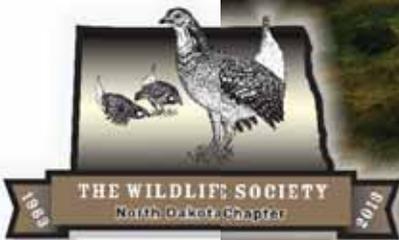


Half-Century of CONSERVATION

The North Dakota Chapter of The Wildlife Society has long been a champion of preserving North Dakota's wetlands, which are critical habitat for migratory waterfowl and other wildlife species.



A long-time, important voice on wildlife issues in North Dakota celebrates its 50th anniversary in 2013.

The North Dakota Chapter of The Wildlife Society was established in 1963 during the rapid and unsustainable development of the state's natural resources. Founded by 43 wildlife biologists and natural resource specialists, the chapter's mission was to provide a forum for members to discuss ecological issues, actively pursue conservation efforts and provide scientific information on sustainable use of natural resources.

"The 1960s and 1970s were the hey-day of environmental legislation, with the Clean Air Act, Clean Water

Act, Wilderness Act, National Environmental Policy Act and the Endangered Species Act all being enacted in about a 10-year period," said Robert Seabloom, biology professor emeritus at the University of North Dakota and 1966 chapter president. "Wildlife Society members back then were passionate about what they believed and some literally laid their jobs on the line."

Since then, the North Dakota chapter has grown to about 400 members representing at least 27 entities, including state and federal agencies, consultants, non-governmental organizations and academia. The chapter typically focuses on major natural resource issues, such as agricultural and energy policy, and relies on the seven

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and Counting

By
Allyn J. Sapa

CRAIG BIRKLE

principles of the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation to determine which issues to target. Today, the chapter is best known as a leader of sound resource management within the decision-making environment of North Dakota.

Defining Issues

Early in its development, the North Dakota chapter tackled a few critical projects that helped shape it as a unified, professional voice for natural resource issues at local, state and federal levels. The Garrison Diversion Irrigation Project is a prime example of the chapter's effective activism.



ND CHAPTER PHOTO

Mike McEnroe, North Dakota Chapter of The Wildlife Society president in 1984, presents Bruce Burkett, a longtime Game and Fish Department game warden, with an award at a chapter function.

Erling "Punch" Podoll (left) was president of the North Dakota Chapter of The Wildlife Society in 1971, and Bob Morgan (right) held the same position in 1964-65 while working at the Game and Fish Department.



MIKE ANDERSON

Garrison Diversion arose through federal legislation in 1965 that authorized the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation to develop 250,000 acres of irrigated land in central, northern and southern North Dakota by diverting Missouri River water from Lake Sakakawea to areas hundreds of miles away. As the project progressed in the 1970s and early '80s, the North Dakota chapter was strongly opposed due to the projected loss of thousands of acres of prairie wetlands, impacts to national wildlife refuges, and the inadequacy of the project's wildlife mitigation plan.

After years of controversy, the chapter changed from project opponent to collaborator and worked with North Dakota's political leaders and water developers to revise project plans. Eventually, the North Dakota chapter, along with the Committee to Save North Dakota, National Audubon Society, National Wildlife Federation and the Canadian government, was instrumental in revising project plans. Additional negotiation and revisions ultimately led to passage of the Garrison Diversion Reformulation Act of 1986, which substantially reduced impacts to national wildlife refuges, wetlands and streams, and created opportunities for constructive conservation.

The chapter's professionalism and willingness to negotiate reasonable solutions on projects affecting the environment established the group's credibility in the state. On April 14, 1986, the governor of North Dakota, the chapter, and state and national environmental groups reached a compromise to resolve long-standing conflicts over water development projects and wetland preservation programs that had spanned three decades.

The agreement launched a new partnership to improve water management and wetland resources in North Dakota and end institutional and political conflicts over wetland acquisition and management programs.

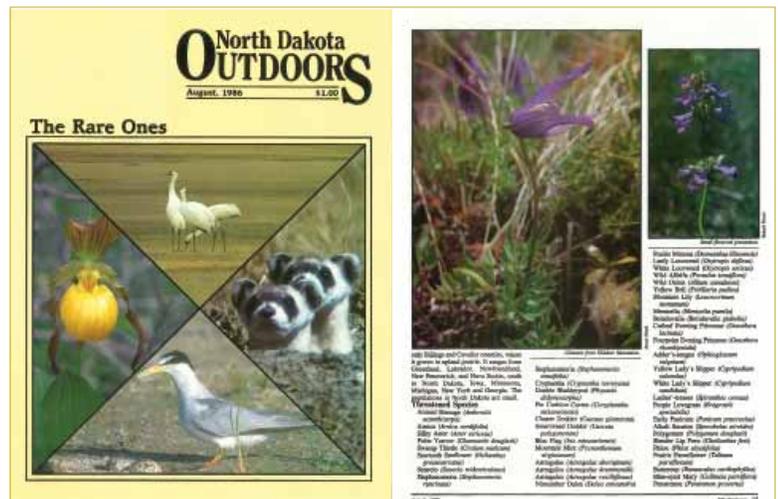
"Without the effort of the Wildlife Society and its members back then, the landscape in North Dakota would have looked differently," Seabloom said. "A lot of our land would have been drained and the refuges would have suffered."

Shortly after forming, the North Dakota chapter launched plans to curb large-scale wetland drainage in the Prairie Pothole Region. Especially common during the 1960s, '70s and '80s, "legal drains" were developed and promoted by county water boards, the State Water Commission and U.S. Soil Conservation Service, and largely ignored impacts on wildlife.

Because of the controversy of these positions, the chapter incorporated as a nonprofit corporation in 1981 under North Dakota law to protect its members from retaliation and financial risk. In 1982, with protections in place, the chapter decided to litigate against wetland drainage projects. These efforts, along with U.S. Department of Agriculture Swampbuster provisions in the 1985 Farm Bill, helped to curtail large-scale drainage projects.

"The chapter was, and still is, one of the most important forces in giving recognition to wildlife issues in the state," said Pam Dryer, 1991 chapter president. "I think that really started when we became involved in wetland issues and the concerns that were taking place in terms of loss of wetlands and degradation of wetland habitat. The chapter has some really strong leaders who stepped up and said that we really have to speak out about this."

The North Dakota chapter also has a history of



The North Dakota Game and Fish Department worked with the chapter to highlight endangered and threatened species in the August 1986 issue of North Dakota OUTDOORS.



North American Model of Wildlife Conservation

- Wildlife is held in public trust
- Eliminating commerce on dead wildlife
- Allocating wildlife use through law
- Hunting opportunity for all
- Wildlife may be killed only for legitimate reasons
- Wildlife is an international resource
- Science is the basis for wildlife policy

tackling issues related to the U.S. Forest Service National Grasslands within the state, including grazing impacts and associated allotment permits, potential wilderness designation and the growing energy industry in western North Dakota.

In the 1990s, chapter members began working with North Dakota's congressional delegation to explore mineral exchanges between the U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Bureau of Land Management and private individuals holding mineral rights in critical badlands habitat.

Largely as a result, President Clinton signed Public Law 105-167 in 1998, directing a mineral exchange of nearly 10,000 acres of privately owned minerals on federal land for other federal minerals. The outcome protected blocks of public land from piecemeal fragmentation of wildlife habitat.



CRAIG BIERLE

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BRUCE KREFT

Sandra Johnson, Game and Fish Department conservation biologist and chapter member, said one of the key issues the chapter will be looking at is the loss of Conservation Reserve Program acres in the state. In 2007, North Dakota had about 3.3 million acres of CRP. Today, that total has been cut to about 1.6 million acres.

The mission of the North Dakota Chapter of The Wildlife Society is to provide a forum for discussion of ecological issues among natural resource professionals; to enable its membership to pursue conservation of natural resources; and to inform the public on ecologically wise use of natural resources in support of a conservation ethic.

Building on Strengths

Over the last few decades, the North Dakota chapter has evolved into an effective independent voice for natural resources in the state. Its success is rooted in the willingness of chapter members to volunteer time, talents and money to solve controversial issues, along with a blend of collective wisdom of many experienced biologists.

“I think the chapter is still looked at as people who have a clear head about fish and wildlife issues, who can speak intelligently, but who can also understand how to approach things, how we need to bring people together and talk about what is good and what is bad about all the different fish and wildlife issues,” Dryer said.

Diverse Membership

Throughout the year, members work on chapter business through administrative, policy and project committees. The chapter has tapped into the expertise of its membership for more than 105 different committees to address contemporary issues, such as Missouri River management and wildlife commercialism.

Some, like the Garrison Diversion Irrigation Project Committee, have been in place for nearly five decades, while others form, resolve the issue and disband.

Using its standing in the state to address issues that affect natural resources, the chapter provides credible objective positions through white papers, testimony and position statements that support good agency environmental decisions.

“In the past, some Wildlife Society members put their jobs on the line for what they believed and it’s something we admire,” said Sandra Johnson, chapter member and North Dakota Game and Fish Department conservation biologist. “I believe the new generation of Wildlife Society members is willing to stand up for what they believe in.”

Professional Forum

Through regular meetings, newsletter and a website, the chapter serves as a forum for social and professional interaction of members and students.

An annual conference is held in February, providing the state’s managers, biologists and students the opportunity to communicate ideas, recognize professional and conservation excellence and generate financial resources.

The chapter has official representation on a number of boards and committees, such as the North Dakota Natural Resources Trust, USDA Technical Committee and Garrison Master Plan.

Through the years, experts associated with the chapter have presented more than 1,000 scientific papers, and had access to panel discussions, research posters and nationally known keynote speakers.

Student Participation

The chapter recognizes the importance of student participation by providing scholarships, travel stipends, free registration for the annual conference and student-professional lunches.

Each year the chapter recognizes academic and professional achievement by students at North Dakota State University, University of North Dakota, Valley City State University, Minot State University (Bottineau) and Sitting Bull College. Students are encouraged to present papers or posters on research projects.

“New members to the Wildlife Society bring a new perspective to how we manage wildlife in the state,” Johnson said.

Lobbying for Change

Recognizing the need for a professional voice for wildlife conservation at the biannual state legislative sessions, the chapter has employed a lobbyist since 1989.

Coordinating through its legislative committee, which includes agency representation and interested members, the chapter provides testimony on major issues affecting wildlife resources in North Dakota.

Direction for the Future

Despite its many accomplishments, contemporary resource issues abound in the state and region.

“One of the key issues we’ll be looking at is the loss of Conservation Reserve Program acres, as we are at a point in our history where we are losing a lot of grassland and wetland habitat,” Johnson said. “Also, oil and gas are booming in western North Dakota and we are still figuring out the impacts to wildlife and habitat and how we will manage that in the future to find a balance.”

The chapter will continue to tap into lessons learned over the past 50 years to address these and other future challenges. Still, the unstated goal remains the same: using the chapter to shape issues for the benefit of wildlife resources in North Dakota.

ALLYN J. SAPA, retired North Dakota field supervisor with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, is the 50th anniversary committee chairman of The Wildlife Society’s North Dakota Chapter.

Learn more about The Wildlife Society’s North Dakota Chapter at <http://joomla.wildlife.org/NorthDakota>.

