

## Conservation Notes #9, December 2016

### CONSERVATION

**“Conservation is getting nowhere because it is incompatible with our Abrahamic concept of land. We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect.”**  
**Aldo Leopold in A Sand County Almanac, 1949.**

Conservation: “the act of conserving, prevention of injury, decay, waste or loss: preservation.”

Conservation in North Dakota is a tough sell. Even though supported by farmers and ranchers, most conservation ideas and programs are opposed by farm organizations. Maybe this is because we left it up to the government and private conservation organizations to deliver. Maybe it is because we view land as “ours” to do with what we want, rather than to preserve it for our grandchildren. We view land as private property right rather than as a private property responsibility. Agri-business may say we don’t have to care for the land; we can sell you a new antidote to make up any loss. The biggest conservation program in decades in North Dakota has been the USDA’s Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). CRP once totaled 3.4 million acres of mostly erodible, poorer quality farmland and brought \$ 120 million annually to North Dakota farmers in Farm Bill payments. Now there are 1.4 million acres of CRP, with less than 100,000 acres projected in the near future. A common response when landowners were signing up for CRP in the 1980s or 90s was “My grandpa should have never broken this land. My dad should have never broken this land” or “I should have never broken this land.” Yet a few changes in subsequent Farm Bills and an increase in crop prices, and 40 years of conservation are gone. Everyone recognizes that conservation is a good thing, for someone else. Over one hundred years ago, 1912, Theodore Roosevelt said **“There is no greater issue than that of conservation in our country.”** Conservation maintains the long-term health of our soil and the production of our food supplies, protects our water, our wildlife, and therefore our people and our way of life.

For more information on this message or other conservation topics, contact Mike McEnroe, President, North Dakota Wildlife Federation, ([memcenroe@midco.net](mailto:memcenroe@midco.net)) or Rick Nelson, President-Elect, North Dakota Chapter of The Wildlife Society, ([bluebill@bis.midco.net](mailto:bluebill@bis.midco.net)).