



Ducks Unlimited Canada
CANADA'S CONSERVATION COMPANY

LANDOWNER PARTNERS WITH DUC TO RESTORE OVER 300 WETLANDS ON HIS LAND

Grande Prairie - Adapting to changing stock, changing climate and changing times is likely to pay off for bison rancher Ross Adam. Ross manages 2,000 head of bison on his family ranch near Grande Prairie and last year, he decided to partner with Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) to restore the wetlands on his property.

“What’s good for the buffalo is good for ducks, too,” said Adam who explained that on spreads with rolling land like he has on his ranch, bison feed on the grassland on the upper slopes in summer and move down to graze on the longer lasting rough, grasses found in wetlands in winter.

However, much of the natural wetlands on the Adam ranch had been drained by Ross’ grandfather, father and himself over the years as they cleared land for pasture for the cattle they used to raise. “The land was very wet 30 years ago. I spent my whole life draining it,” said Adam, “now I’m working just as hard to bring the wetlands back.”

Adam approached Ducks Unlimited Canada for advice and assistance. He met with Dave Matheson, DUC’s field representative in the Grande Prairie area, to talk about wetlands restoration. Matheson pulled out DUC aerial maps of the ranch from 1949-50 and then walked the land with Adam, looking for depressions that indicate an old water basin. “Sometimes you’ll spot plants that are different too – sedges and slough grass,” said Matheson, “and you find old ditches that were used to drain the water off.”

Due to the extent of the property, DUC completed a detailed wetland inventory to identify existing and drained wetlands. With this inventory and Adam’s personal knowledge of the land, restoration sites were confirmed. A long term agreement was signed that covers restoration of up to 300 wetlands on 30 quarter sections of land over the three years (2005-07).

“This project is unique in the area because of its size and the long term relationship we have forged,” said Rick Shewchuk, head of Wetland Restoration Alberta for DUC. “We were delighted when Ross approached us and we discovered we had mutual goals.”

DUC began its restoration work on the Adam ranch in September 2005 by re-contouring the artificial drainage works to their natural condition, in essence filling and grading the ditches – a first step in restoring natural water levels.

In July 2006, DUC engineers headed up to the Adams ranch to do reconnaissance for the more involved work of building dams and berms. DUC expects to restore 40-50 wetlands on the Adam ranch in 2006, and an equal or greater number in 2007.

The lack of snow this winter resulted in very little run-off water, so there were few immediate results from early restoration work. But Adam is optimistic that the work will pay off over time. The Adams have seven children and four are now working the land alongside their parents. Restoring the wetlands is a legacy for them, as well as for the waterfowl and natural life they will support.

Ducks Unlimited Canada is a private, not-for-profit, Canadian organization. Since 1938 DUC has positively influenced more than 24.9 million acres (over 10 million hectares) of wetland and upland habitat for the benefit of waterfowl, other wildlife and people. For information, go to www.ducks.ca , call your local DUC office or toll-free in Alberta 1-866-479-3825.

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BACKGROUND

Wetlands Restoration in Peace Country ↑

Ducks Unlimited Canada has been working on wetlands conservation projects in the Grande Prairie area for 25-30 years. The first efforts focused on preservation, working with farmers on stabilizing the wetlands by convincing them not to drain their land, and in a few cases, restoring them. By the mid 80s, DUC was still restoring wetlands, but had switched focus to restoring the uplands, a valuable resource for nesting and feeding. Today, DUC is working with landowners, primarily farmers like Adam, to restore wetlands that were drained or altered. Fifty-five wetlands were restored in the Grande Prairie area last year, and DUC expects to maintain that level of effort over the next 5 years.

Wetlands Restoration ↑

Because we have already lost 70 percent of our natural wetlands in Canada, it is vital that we protect and preserve those that remain. Restoring habitat lost to industry, agriculture, drought or population growth is a key priority for DUC. The loss of wetlands upsets the ecological balance between land and water, increases the incidence of drought and flooding, and threatens the survival of many species, including the dwindling number of continental pintails.

DUC Alberta carefully selects restoration projects that are the most significant and feasible. Projects can be as small as building a dam on a farmer's property to restore a pond, to massive initiatives requiring large infusions of resources and money over time such as the Frank Lake project near High River, Alberta, where conservation efforts have been ongoing since 1952.

Wetlands ↑

Wetlands and the habitats associated with them function like huge water filters. Excess nutrients, soil particles and pollutants captured and carried by moving water settle in wetlands. When teamed with water treatment facilities, wetlands contribute to water quality and are part of healthy, functioning watersheds. Wetlands help provide water during periods of drought and control the effects of flooding. Water in wetlands permeates underlying soils and help recharge underground aquifers. Almost one-third of the world's population relies on underground aquifers as their only source of drinking water. Wetlands provide essential habitat for wildlife. In Alberta, they help support 250 species of birds, 44 species of mammals and 36% of Canada's rare and endangered species.

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