

CONSERVATION *Showcase*



Winnebago Co. Century Farm Now Youth Conservation Area

If her father Herbert Holland were still alive, Martha Olson is certain he would approve of the name change on their family's Winnebago County farm. Instead of being called the "Holland Century Farm" it is now known as the "Holland Prairie Conservation and Youth Hunting Area."

More than 20 years ago her father started a conservation tradition when he enrolled the farm in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). When that contract expired, he entered the farm into the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP).

The new name signals the start of another conservation chapter on this farmland. It also means young people can enjoy an area of wetlands, hills, trees and native grasses set aside exclusively to help them experience outdoor activities.

The farm is owned by Holland family members—Olson, of Jewell and her sister Diane Rickerl of Aurora, S.D. The Winnebago County Conservation Board manages the 139-acres of land now open to youth for hunting, fishing and nature study.

The sisters purchased the farm from their father, Herbert Holland in 2003.

While their father may be gone, his conservation ethic is still influencing his daughters.



Parent/child hunting teams like Russ Tenold and son Gage Tenold from rural Northwood now hunt a 139-acre "youth hunting" wildlife area in Winnebago County. NRCS Photo by Brenda Tenold-Moretz.

"We went into the youth hunting lease with the county conservation board because of the vision of our father," said Olson. "Dad had a great love of the land. He respected nature and he enjoyed the wildlife grasses and prairie look and he wanted to continue that. We like the idea that this farm will be preserved."

Olson's great grandfather originally purchased the farm in 1873. He tilled the land that year and it was tilled every year since until 1987 when Holland enrolled it in the Conservation Reserve Program.

"Dad put the land in CRP," said Olson, "because he thought the land needed a rest."

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The land continued in CRP until 2006 when, just before Herbert died, he enrolled it in the Wetlands Reserve Program with a permanent easement. “Dad wanted the land in the WRP,” Olson said, “because he wanted to protect the oak trees and maintain the native prairie for the wildlife. Now, with the land in WRP, it is permanently out of production. We are pleased that is the case.”

WRP helps landowners restore wetlands previously altered for agricultural uses through financial assistance, technical help and easements. USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) administers the program.

Lynn Kluver, NRCS soil conservation technician, says the new wetlands will slow and retain water, which can reduce spring river levels. That can benefit downstream cities like Forest City and Mason City. “The wetlands,” said Kluver, “will reduce sedimentation, provide cleaner water and more wildlife habitat. Native grass stands reduce wind and water erosion. All of these make a contribution to improving the environment.”

Other improvements will specifically benefit wildlife such as blue stem and Indian grasses to improve pheasant habitat and oak trees provide acorns, a food source for wild turkeys.

Olson says the improvements attract more wildlife to the farm and their adjacent farm home. She jokes that when her husband Robert Olson, a professional carpenter, works on their farmhouse he includes binoculars in his tool kit. He likes to watch wildlife and there is a lot of wildlife around the farm to watch.



Martha Olson stands in front of a sign that announces the Winnebago County century farm she owns with her sister Diane Rickerl is now northern Iowa’s first “youth hunting” wildlife area.

Numbers of hunters are up, too. “There is a lot more hunting in this area than when I grew up,” she said. “They now come from all over. It’s a big thing compared to what it was before.”

The Holland Prairie Conservation and Youth Hunting Area is located 2 miles north of Leland and 1/2 mile east of the Highway 9/69 junction. Young hunters, 15-years-old and under will be allowed to hunt on the area while accompanied by a licensed adult, 21-years and older. A free permit, issued by the Winnebago County Conservation Board, is required. The permit allows for one youth and one adult per hunting outing. No more than two permits will be issued simultaneously.

For information about WRP, CRP or other conservation programs, contact your local USDA Service Center or NRCS office.

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