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Town and Country Resource Conservation
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Special thanks to the
Piper Road Spring Band
for their performance.

Many other partners contributed to the success of the project:

- *Pheasants Forever*
- *US Fish & Wildlife Service*
- *Walworth County Land Use & Resource Management Department*

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Turtle Valley Wildlife Area



The Turtle Valley project began as a collaborative effort between the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources in 1999. NRCS's Wetlands Reserve Program offered an opportunity to restore over 1800 acres to a high quality wetland complex. Two landowners enrolled land into the program. These two parcels form the core of the current 2300-acre Turtle Valley Wildlife Area, which is now owned and managed by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.

Since restoration began, Turtle Valley has become home to great numbers of bobolinks, upland sandpipers and other sensitive grassland birds, as well as mallards, blue-winged teal and a host of other waterfowl and shorebirds. Habitat has also been improved for threatened and endangered species in the area including American bittern, Wilson's phalarope, and king rail, Blandings turtle, and eastern massasauga rattlesnake.

The Turtle Valley Wildlife Area contains part of the headwaters of both Sugar and Turtle Creeks. The area was extensively drained by over 130 miles of tile and over 6 miles of deep ditches and straightened and dredged creeks. Twelve wetland areas consisting of over 650 acres of water, more than 950 acres of wet prairie, and more than 200 acres of upland prairie are being developed.

A wetland and wildlife area of this magnitude and in this part of the state, which is urbanizing so rapidly, is an asset to the region. Future generations will be grateful for the cleaner water, open space and wildlife habitat that this wetland will secure.

Turtle Valley Wildlife Area

The Turtle Valley Wildlife Area, currently extends for over 2300 acres in southeast Wisconsin. The area includes 1800 acres of prime wetland stretching for more than five miles in the northwest part of Walworth County.

The wetland is being restored to its original condition by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service through its Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) in cooperation with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. This 1800-acre easement is the largest individual Wetlands Reserve Program restoration to date in Wisconsin. The easement will secure the wetland for future generations. The property is now owned by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and joins with 500 acres of existing DNR land. It is the centerpiece of the state's new Turtle Valley Wildlife Area, which offers outdoor recreational opportunities such as hiking, hunting and wildlife viewing in the part of the state with the most people and demand, but with the least amount of public recreational land.

In the early 1900's, this vast wetland prairie was drained for farming with an extensive network of ditches and drain tile. Because the soil, primarily Houghton Muck, has high amounts of organic matter, it is very fertile and produces good crop yields, although it ponds frequently and has high risk of early frost. In dry weather, this soil dries to a powdery fluff that suffers from severe erosion by wind. Over time the soil subsides, shrinking down significantly from its former depth.

Restoration involves filling drainage ditches, breaking drain tile, as well as seeding. Some wetland restoration enhancements were made by reshaping potholes and swales and constructing low embankments.

The three primary functions of wetlands are to store floodwaters, provide wildlife habitat, and filter sediment and pollutants from water. This area also has unique wildlife value, because historically, several endangered species were known to exist here. The project spans the watershed divide at the headwaters of two streams -- Turtle Creek, flowing to the Rock River, and Sugar Creek, flowing to the Fox River.

Of the 1,800 acres, nearly 1600 acres will actually be wetland with the remaining upland and buffer areas to be seeded to native prairie species. Wetlands will vary from saturated conditions with a diverse plant community such as rushes and sedges to areas with semi-permanent and permanent open water areas. Upland and non-restorable areas will be restored to native grasses and prairie flowers to provide habitat and nesting cover for wildlife.

