

## Landowners Enroll in WRP to Continue a Father's Legacy

By: Jennifer Salak, NRCS Earth Team Volunteer

In 1993, Jodie Haxton's dad took a wet, unproductive piece of his farmland near the Blue River in Wilber, Neb., and put it into the former Water Bank Program to provide habitat for migratory waterfowl, particularly ducks. When he passed away in 2002, Jodie and her husband, Dennis, bought the property so it would remain in the family for many generations.

The Water Bank contract expired in 2003, and Jodie wanted to find a way to continue her father's legacy of love for ducks. She and Dennis went to their local Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) office in Wilber and enlisted the help of Resource Conservationist Ross Scott.



Jennifer Salak, NRCS

*Jodie and Dennis Haxton stand on their new earthen berm, which was installed using Wetlands Reserve Program funds.*

Scott told them about the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) and explained how the program could provide technical and financial assistance to incorporate new structures with the two-acre pond already located on the property. "WRP was a perfect fit for the Haxtons," explained Scott. "They had the eligible land needed for the program and a strong desire to maintain that land as wildlife habitat."

The Haxtons excitedly agreed to enroll 15 acres into the program and were also happy to learn that their property would be the first WRP contract in Saline County. "Their 15 acres put us well on our way to achieving our goal of enrolling 100 acres of eligible land into WRP in the Lower Big Blue Natural Resources District," said Scott.

Using WRP funds and technical help from a team of NRCS, and other experts, last summer the Haxtons constructed an earthen berm with a spillway adjacent to the existing two-acre pond and a shallow water habitat located on low-lying land behind the berm. Inside the berm is a water control structure that will allow them to seasonally adjust the water level.

Since construction ended, Jodie and Dennis have taken an active role in managing the land. They continue to cut down trees and brush that are invasive to their wetlands, and have seeded the earthen berm with native grasses. These newly planted grasses will blend in well with the existing saltgrass and wheatgrass. There are also wetland plants on site such as smart weed, sedges, and scouring rush.

So far, the Haxton's have seen an incredible variety of wildlife on their wetlands including blue herons, Canada geese, snow geese, and shore birds.

Although they love to see this abundance of wildlife, the animals that have brought them the most joy are the ducks like the mallards, Blue-winged teals, pintails, canvasbacks, and wood ducks. Jodie says, "seeing the ducks makes me think of my dad, and he would be so pleased if he were here today to see what we have done with this land."

Once the wetland is finished, Dennis plans on setting up a duck blind and Jodie, who loves baby ducks, plans on installing wood duck boxes to promote nesting. Overall, they have been very happy with WRP and would recommend it to other landowners.

Jodie and Dennis come out to the wetlands often, and when they see groups of ducks bobbing on the water and hear the sweet sounds of the songbirds and the gentle rustling of grasses in the breeze, they look at each other and say, "This is what it's all about." ♦



*My dad would be so pleased if he were here today to see what we have done with this land.*

**- Jodie Haxton,  
Landowner**



Jennifer Salak, NRCS

*Native grasses surround the shallow water habitat on the Haxton's WRP land.*



**Helping People Help the Land**

