

Landowners key to preserving Prairie Pothole habitat

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(Phys.org) —A survey of Midwest landowners will help policymakers find ways to further incentivize conservation of wetlands and grasslands in the Prairie Pothole Region, according to Larry Gigliotti, assistant unit leader for the U.S. Geological Survey's South Dakota Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit.

The Prairie Pothole Region extends from Montana through the Dakotas and extends into Minnesota and Iowa. The region supports half of North America's migrating waterfowl as well as a plethora of other bird species. An estimated 85 percent of the nation's 64 million acres in the Prairie Pothole Region is privately owned.

Through a three-year grant from the Plains and Prairie Pothole Landscape Conservation Cooperative, Gigliotti and an SDSU doctoral student will work with state wildlife agencies to survey landowners in six states—North and South Dakota, Wyoming, Montana, Minnesota and Iowa.

"The states have different ecosystems and constraints, and therefore, different threats to habitat," Gigliotti explained. Each fish and wildlife agency will design and implement customized surveys with input by natural resource experts from the Plains and Prairie Potholes LCC Technical Committee. The western part of the region contains more grasslands, while the eastern section has more wetlands.

"Our role will be to coordinate the effort and analyze the data," said

Gigliotti, noting each state's help distributing surveys will be essential.

Participants will be asked about their attitudes toward land management and participation in the conservation programs and practices. The goal will be to determine what incentives will motivate landowners to adopt conservation measures, Gigliotti said.

According to U.S. Department of Agriculture statistics, half of the farmers and ranchers will retire in the next 10 years, so the issue of who will inherit or buy the land will impact conservation efforts in the region, he explained.

As a result, the upcoming generational change represents an opportunity for this research to help the new landowners effectively build [conservation](#) of wetlands and grasslands into their operations to benefit wildlife and their bottom line.

Provided by South Dakota State University

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