

CHRIS McLELAND

EDUCATION

Bachelor of Science (Fisheries & Wildlife)
University of Missouri-Columbia

Associate of Science
Moberly Area Community College

ADMINISTRATIVE EXPERIENCE

Managing Director of Agriculture Programs – Ducks Unlimited

July 2022 – Present

Responsibilities Include:

- Provide direct oversight and leadership of agricultural staff across the Great Lakes/Atlantic Region, which includes a team of 20 Conservation Delivery staff, as well as administrative support positions ensuring that all strategic goals and priorities are achieved through increased landowner services that address fish, forest, wildlife, and natural community resources.
- Working in coordination with regional leadership, ensure Conservation Delivery staff have the direction and tools they need to effectively implement State and Federal cost share programs (EQIP, CRP, RCPP, WRE, Partners for Fish and Wildlife) that address critical resource concerns within the Great Lakes/Atlantic Region. Responsible for creating a highly functioning, highly successful Regional Team within the that prides itself on innovation and success. Provide professional growth and career development opportunities for staff through the establishment of annual goals and objectives as well as annual performance reviews.
- As the organizational lead for the GLAR Agriculture Team, responsible for building and maintaining highly functioning and effective relationship with State, Federal and NGO partners, and actively look for opportunities to leverage funding and staff to address critical resource concerns. Work with partners to develop new and innovative conservation programs or partnerships and secure the funding necessary to deliver those programs within the Great Lakes/Atlantic Region.
- Coordinate with DU's National Policy Team to develop Farm Bill policy recommendations, as well as coordinate and support legislative events such as field tours and fly-ins.
- Through close coordination with regional leadership, secure and deliver agreements that represent a significant investment by State and Federal partners, processing, and tracking all expenditures and developing detailed quarterly summaries indicating private land effectiveness and accomplishments across the Delivery Team. Work closely with State, Federal and NGO partners to revise and improve the Regional Programs to ensure it remains effective in serving landowners and addressing fish, forest, and wildlife resources. Responsible for developing, administering and tracking all cooperative agreements related to positions and programs within the Great Lakes/Atlantic Region and developing monthly activity reports as required by the agreements.
- Through close coordination and collaboration with the DU's Fundraising Team, strive to secure major gifts through the development of strategic "asks" to major donors and corporate partners within the agricultural space.
- Support Ducks Unlimited on national agriculture issues. Provide leadership and coordination with partner organizations by serving as the regional contact for NRCS National and State Office Staff, and other resource partners. Serve as the regional liaison to related government agencies, conservation, and agriculture groups (Corn Growers, Farm Bureau, Cattlemen Association), civic and commodity groups, municipalities, and

urban partners. Provides regional comments and recommendations for policies, programs or proposed legislation affecting private lands across the Region.

- Serve as the primary point of contact for all coordination and support of state-level legislative needs which concern agriculture or the Farm Bill.
- Support the development of state-level strategic planning across the organization, utilizing these plans to address areas of critical emphasis as well as the development of the new national strategic plan.
- As the private land lead, responsible for developing and coordinating the creation or revision of landowner information and educational needs and/or exhibits. Responsible for promoting private land programs and services through avenues such as oral presentations, news media and personal contacts, social media. Provide oversight and perspective for the Organization by serving on 3 Joint Venture Management Boards, AFWA – RCPP & EQIP Working Group(S).

Vice President of Conservation Delivery – Pheasants Forever Inc. & Quail Forever

July 2021 – July 2022

Responsibilities Include:

- Provide direct oversight and leadership of all conservation delivery staff across all four operational regions (Midwest, South, Northeast, and West), which includes 318 Conservation Delivery staff, a team of four Regional Directors of Conservation Delivery as well as administrative support positions ensuring that all strategic goals and priorities are achieved through increased landowner services that address fish, forest, wildlife, and natural community resources.
- Working in coordination with Field Leadership, ensure Conservation Delivery staff have the direction and tools they need to effectively implement State and Federal cost share programs (EQIP, CRP, RCPP, WRE, Partners for Fish and Wildlife) that address critical resource concerns within the South Region. Responsible for creating a highly functioning, highly successful Regional Team within the that prides itself on innovation and success. Provide professional growth and career development opportunities for staff through the establishment of annual goals and objectives as well as annual performance reviews. Responsible for developing and coordinating cross training opportunities for all regional staff related to landowner services and Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever strategic Priorities (Habitat, Advocacy and Education and Outreach).
- As the Organizational Lead for the Conservation Delivery Team, responsible for building and maintaining highly functioning and effective relationship with State, Federal and NGO partners, and actively look for opportunities to leverage funding and staff to address critical resource concerns. Work with partners to develop new and innovative conservation programs or partnerships and secure the funding necessary to deliver those programs within the South Region, specifically, working within the programs offered within the Conservation Title of the 2018 Farm Bill.
- As the Regional lead for Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever, coordinate with multiple conservation partners (State, Federal, NGO, Joint Ventures, Private Industry) on Federal Farm Bill policy and the develop and use of private land programs within the South Region. and communicate conservation issues to district, regional, and Central Office administrative teams.

- Through close coordination with the Finance Team, administer agreements that represents a significant investment by State and Federal partners, processing, and tracking all expenditures and developing detailed quarterly summaries indicating private land effectiveness and accomplishments across the Delivery Team. Work closely with State, Federal and NGO partners to revise and improve the Regional Programs to ensure it remains effective in serving landowners and addressing fish, forest, and wildlife resources. Responsible for developing, administering and tracking all cooperative agreements related to positions and programs within the South Region and developing monthly activity reports as required by the agreements.
- Represents the organization on national private land issues. Provides leadership and coordination with partner organizations by serving as the regional contact for NRCS National and State Office Staff, and other resource partners. Serve as the regional liaison to related government agencies, conservation, and agriculture groups (Corn Growers, Farm Bureau, Cattlemen Association), civic and commodity groups, municipalities, and urban partners. Provides regional comments and recommendations for policies, programs or proposed legislation affecting private lands across the Region
- Serve as the primary point of contact for all coordination and support of state-level legislative policy needs or issues. Coordinate legislative activities such as testimony, and media “call to action” efforts within our grassroots supporters. Responsible for developing all legislative goals and strategies for state-level work.
- Lead the development of state-level strategic planning across the organization, utilizing these plans to address areas of critical emphasis as well as the development of the new national strategic plan.
- As the private land lead, responsible for developing and coordinating the creation or revision of landowner information and educational needs and/or exhibits. Responsible for promoting private land programs and services through avenues such as oral presentations, news media and personal contacts, social media. Provide oversight and perspective for the Organization by serving on 3 Joint Venture Management Boards, AFWA – RCPP & EQIP Working Group, National Bobwhite Technical Committee – Ag Policy Committee.
- As a member of the Executive Team, routinely communicate success, needs and challenges to Pheasants Forever Leadership. Providing presentations and updates as requested and coordinating across Departments to provide support and resources to accomplish our mission.

Director of Field Operations – Pheasants Forever Inc. & Quail Forever

February 2017- July 2022

Responsibilities Include:

- Provide direct oversight and leadership of all private land field operations with the South Region, which includes 119 Conservation Delivery staff. Provide direct supervision of 21 conservation delivery employees, including 5 State Coordinators (Mid-Level Managers) ensuring that all strategic goals and priorities are achieved through increased landowner services that address fish, forest, wildlife, and natural community resources.
- Working in coordination with Field Leadership, ensure Conservation Delivery staff have the direction and tools they need to effectively implement State and Federal cost share programs (EQIP, CRP, RCPP, WRE, Partners for Fish and Wildlife) that address critical resource concerns within the South Region. Responsible for creating a highly functioning, highly successful Regional Team within the that prides itself on innovation and success. Provide professional growth and career development opportunities for staff through the establishment of annual goals and objectives as well as annual performance reviews. Responsible for developing and coordinating cross training opportunities for all regional staff related to landowner services and Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever strategic Priorities (Habitat, Advocacy and Education and Outreach).
- As the Organizational Lead for the South Region, responsible for building and maintaining highly functioning and effective relationship with State, Federal and NGO partners, and actively look for

opportunities to leverage funding and staff to address critical resource concerns. Work with partners to develop new and innovative conservation programs or partnerships and secure the funding necessary to deliver those programs within the South Region, specifically, working within the programs offered within the Conservation Title of the 2018 Farm Bill.

- As the Regional lead for Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever, coordinate with multiple conservation partners (State, Federal, NGO, Joint Ventures, Private Industry) on Federal Farm Bill policy and the develop and use of private land programs within the South Region. and communicate conservation issues to district, regional, and Central Office administrative teams.
- Through close coordination with the Finance Team, administer agreements that represents a significant investment by State and Federal partners, processing, and tracking all expenditures and developing detailed quarterly summaries indicating private land effectiveness and accomplishments within the South Region. Work closely with State, Federal and NGO partners to revise and improve the Regional Programs to ensure it remains effective in serving landowners and addressing fish, forest, and wildlife resources. Responsible for developing, administering and tracking all cooperative agreements related to positions and programs within the South Region and developing monthly activity reports as required by the agreements.
- As the private land lead, represents the South Region Team on Statewide and National private land issues. Provides leadership and coordination with partner organizations by serving as the regional contact for NRCS National and State Office Staff, and other resource partners. Serve as the regional liaison to related government agencies, conservation, and agriculture groups (Corn Growers, Farm Bureau, Cattlemen Association), civic and commodity groups, municipalities, and urban partners. Provides regional comments and recommendations for policies, programs or proposed legislation affecting private lands across the Region.
- As the private land lead, responsible for developing and coordinating the creation or revision of landowner information and educational needs and/or exhibits. Responsible for promoting private land programs and services through avenues such as oral presentations, news media and personal contacts, social media. Provide oversight and perspective for the Organization by serving on 3 Joint Venture Management Boards, AFWA – RCPP & EQIP Working Group, National Bobwhite Technical Committee – Ag Policy Committee.
- As a member of the Field Leadership Team, routinely communicate success, needs and challenges to Pheasants Forever Leadership. Providing presentations and updates as requested and coordinating across Departments to provide support and resources to accomplish our mission.

Private Land Services Regional Supervisor-Missouri Department of Conservation

September 2015- February 2016

Responsibilities Include:

- Provide direct oversight and leadership of all private land field operations, including the direct supervision of six, full-time Private Land Biologists and one Community Conservationist within Central Region (14 Counties), ensuring that all strategic goals and priorities are achieved through increased landowner services that address fish, forest, wildlife and natural community resources.
- Provide staff with the direction and tools they need to effectively implement State and Federal cost share programs (EQIP, CRP, RCPP, WRE, MDC-LAP, Partners for Fish and Wildlife) that address critical resource concerns within the Central Region. Responsible for creating a highly functioning, highly successful Private Lands Team within the Central Region that prides itself on innovation and success. Provide professional growth and career development opportunities for staff through the establishment of annual goals and objectives as well as annual performance reviews. Responsible for developing and coordinating cross training opportunities for all regional staff (Private Lands, Forestry, Wildlife, Fisheries) related to landowner services and private land programs.

- As the lead private land contact for the region, responsible for building and maintaining highly functioning and effective relationship with State, Federal and NGO partners, and actively look for opportunities to leverage funding and staff to address critical resource concerns. Work with partners to develop new and innovative conservation programs or partnerships and secure the funding necessary to deliver those programs within the Central Region. Recent efforts include:
 - Coordinating partner support and securing funding to establish the Small Game Set Aside program within the newly developed West Fork Quail Focus Area
 - Partnering with the City of Columbia to secure funding to further urban Monarch Conservation efforts by developing a cooperative Community Conservationist Position.
 - Continuing to develop partner support and cost share funds in the utilization of diverse cover crop cocktail mixes within agriculture rotations.
 - Working with State and Federal Partners to develop an outreach and marketing campaign to promote EQIP-Monarch.
- As the regional private land lead, coordinate all private land programs within the Central Region and communicate conservation issues to district, regional, and Central Office administrative teams. Responsible for the development of the annual Regional Operating Budget as well as the Regional Cost Share Budget, tracking and reconciling all expenditures quarterly as well as annually.
- Administer MDC Regional Cost Share Program, processing and tracking all expenditures and developing detailed quarterly summaries indicating private land effectiveness and accomplishments within the Central Region. Work closely with State, Federal and NGO partners to revise and improve the Regional Cost Share Program to ensure it remains effective in serving landowners and addressing fish, forest and wildlife resources. Responsible for tracking all cooperative agreements related to positions and programs within the Central Region and developing monthly activity reports as required by the agreements.
- As the private land lead, represents the Regional Coordination Team on Statewide private land issues. Provides leadership and coordination with partner organizations by serving as the regional contact for NRCS/FSA Area and State Office Staff, Quail Forever, Soil and Water Conservation District and other resource partners. Serve as the regional liaison to related government agencies, conservation and agriculture groups (Corn Growers, Farm Bureau, Cattlemen Association), civic and commodity groups, municipalities and urban partners. Provides regional comments and recommendations for policies, programs or proposed legislation affecting private lands in Missouri.
- As the private land lead, responsible for developing and coordinating the creation or revision of landowner information and educational needs and/or exhibits. Responsible for promoting private land programs and services through avenues such as oral presentations, news media and personal contacts.

Private Land Programs Biologist/Wetland Biologist Supervisor-Missouri Department of Conservation

November 2011-September 2015

Responsibilities Include:

- Domiciled at the Missouri NRCS State Office, serving as a member of the NRCS Field Technical Services and Water Resources State Office Staff, working directly with NRCS Leadership, State Biologist, Forester and WRE Coordinator to build a proactive and functioning relationship between MDC and USDA. Provided guidance directly to USDA staff to incorporate and address fish, forest and wildlife considerations into USDA programs such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), Wetland Reserve Easement Program (ACEP- WRE) and other Farm Bill programs. Responsible for the development of new or the revision of conservation program policies and standards/specifications related to fish, forest and wildlife programs within the Farm Bill. Work directly with the MDC Farm Bill Coordinator, Area Biologists, Wetland Biologists and other MDC staff to consolidate the MDC perspective into Farm Bill program design and operation. Conducts in-depth review of Farm Bill program operational guidelines and participates in NRCS

state level training efforts and quality reviews to inform and train NRCS, SWCD, and MDC & QF Staff on the utilization of the programs.

- Directly supervised of four, full-time Wetland Services Biologist located within the NRCS Wetland Emphasis Teams across the State Missouri, provide leadership and guidance, ensuring that all strategic goals and priorities were achieved specifically in the delivery of State and Federal wetland restoration programs such as WRP, CRP (CP 9 & 23), Missouri Ag Wetland Initiative & ACEP-WRE. Provide professional growth and career development opportunities for staff through the establishment of annual goals and objectives as well as annual performance reviews, as well as looking for opportunities to expand the scope of our efforts, such as the inclusion of monarch friendly upland seeding's within WRE restorations.
- Responsible for developing and maintaining a high-level working relationship with Federal, State and NGO partners from Missouri and the Midwest, in order to development and secure/leverage funding implement innovative conservation programs and support cooperative positions that aid with the delivery of private land conservation efforts within the State of Missouri, and surrounding states. Such efforts and accomplishments include:
 - Assisted in securing grant funding to support the initial Quail Forever Farm Bill Biologists in Missouri and assisting with staff onboarding.
 - Developed a cooperative partnership with Ducks Unlimited, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, NRCS and MDC and secured funding to develop the Missouri Ag Wetland Initiative, supporting wetland conservation efforts within priority geographies in Missouri.
 - Developed a successful Wetland Restoration Enhancement Program (WREP) proposal (\$2.4 million) leveraging staff, partners support and securing long term funding for the program.
 - Co-lead in the development of both a multi-state and local, Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) proposal focused on grassland and woodland conservation efforts within the State of Missouri, leveraging staff time and funding to address critical conservation concerns, and was successful in receiving the grant.
 - Co-lead in the development of the first Voluntary Access Program – Habitat Incentive Program proposal (VPA-HIP) for the State of Missouri. Coordinated the implementation and program roll out of the Missouri Outdoor Recreational Access Program.
 - Work directly with NRCS leadership, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Partners in the development of Federal Farm Bill programs and practice standards and specifications focused on Monarch restoration and conservation throughout the State of Missouri.
- As a member of the NRCS Staff, attended NRCS State Level meetings, and strategic planning sessions, (ARC Meeting, State Technical Committee Meeting, CRP & EQIP Sub-Committee) providing the fish, forest and wildlife perspective to key FSA and NRCS Leadership to aid in setting State and Regional Priorities for Farm Bill Programs. Routinely coordinated and worked with State and Federal counterparts throughout the Midwest (Iowa, Nebraska, Kansas, Texas) on the development and implementation of regional conservation programs and initiatives. Provided insight and guidance to National groups such as the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies for the purposes of rallying Farm Bill program support.
- Responsible for overseeing annual and regional operating budgets, as well as the WRP-WRE annual allocation through the Wetland Services Biologist. Was responsible for the development of quarterly and annual accomplishment reports for the purposes of meeting Federal and State grant obligations as well as providing accomplishment reports to NRCS for the purposes of annual reporting. Represented the Missouri Department of Conservation, Private Land Services Division on multiple State Level and Federal Level working groups.
- Served and the primary program lead for Farm Bill Conservation policy and advocacy efforts, specifically within the Title II – Conservation Provision.

PROFESSIONAL FIELD EXPERIENCE

Private Land Biologist-Missouri Department of Conservation

April 2010-November 2011

Responsibilities Include:

- Work with State and Federal partners to lead, develop and deliver private land programs and initiatives, the MDC Landowner Assistance Program as well as Farm Bill programs that address important natural resource issues such as habitat degradation and pollinator conservation with the two county districts. Provide one-on-one natural resource technical advice to all landowners within my assigned district through on-site visits and management plan development while actively working to strengthen the relationship between MDC, NRCS, FSA, SWCD and USFWS through cooperative efforts such as landowner workshops and technical assistance. Other efforts included being actively involved with community activities such as the local FFA chapters, local NGO's such as Quail Forever chapters within the two county districts.

Assistant Wildlife Biologist -Missouri Department of Conservation

May 2009-April 2010

Responsibilities Included:

- Directly responsible for planning and overseeing and completing all habitat management activities on six public conservation areas within the Green Hills Conservation District in Northeast Missouri which included a 6,700 acre intensively managed wetland area. Provided direct supervision and leadership to three salaried personnel four temporary employees, ensuring the completion and achievement of annual work objectives. Responsible for conducting annual performance appraisals as well as outlining daily job duties, providing staff with the tools they need to complete projects efficiently and accurately. Responsible for the development and oversight of the District's annual operating budget as well as the permittee Ag Crop program and contracts as well as operating the annual waterfowl hunt program.

Supervisory Biological Science Technician-U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

March 2005-May 2009

Responsibilities Included:

- Working in cooperation with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Nebraska Fish and Game, South Dakota DNR to monitor and manage flood plain natural communities along the lower Missouri river. Supervised two term employees and seven hourly employees in conducting species sampling, assessing species richness/diversity of four artificial side chutes within the lower Missouri River. Responsible for following all USACE sampling protocols to ensure data was collected and processed accurately. Responsible for coordinating all sampling efforts (weekly work schedules, over-night travel arrangements) for all Mitigation project staff. Responsible for the development of detailed annual reports and management recommendations to the USACE to aid in the management of the lower Missouri River, specifically for Threatened and Endangered Species.

ACTIVITIES/COMMITTEES

NCLI Alumni – Cohort 14

AFWA – MAFWA Private Land Working Group

NBCI – Private Lands Working Group

SBEN – Bioenergy Working Group

Quail & Small Game Task Force

State Wetland Coordination Team

Cover Crop Working Group

CRP Subcommittee – Mo State Technical Committee

EQIP Subcommittee – Mo State Technical Committee
VPA-HIP Program Development Committee
MO Chapter of the Wildlife Society-Professional Development Committee
Chapter President – Mid-Mo Uplanders Quail Forever

AWARDS

2019 – Most Valued Employee PF/QF
2018 – Conservation Warrior Award PF/QF
2014-Tricia R. Radford Team Award- NBCI Focus Area Quail Surveys

2013-Conservation Federation of Missouri Soil Conservationist of the Year
2010-Missouri Department of Conservation Achievement Award, CWD Coordination
2007-U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Award of Merit
2007-U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Award of Merit- Exemplary Supervision
2007-U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Award of Merit
2006-U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Award of Merit
2005-Missouri Department of Conservation Wildlife Division Achievement Award

REFERENCES

Bill White
Private Land Services Division Chief
Missouri Department of Conservation
2901 West Truman Blvd
Jefferson City, Mo 65109
W: 573.522.4115
C: 573.291.9224
E: bill.white@mdc.mo.gov

Nate Goodrich
State Resource Conservationist – NRCS Missouri State Office
601 Business Loop 70W, Suite 25
Columbia, Mo 65202
W: 573.876.0908
E: nate.goodrich@usda.gov

Kelly Srigley Werner
Private Lands Coordinator
Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program
Missouri Private Lands Office
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
101 Park Deville Dr., Suite B
Columbia, Mo 65203
W: 573.234.2132 x 112
E: Kelly_sriglywerner@fws.gov

Truth in Testimony Disclosure Form

In accordance with Rule XI, clause 2(g)(5)* of the *Rules of the House of Representatives*, witnesses are asked to disclose the following information. Please complete this form electronically by filling in the provided blanks.

Committee: _____

Subcommittee: _____

Hearing Date: _____

Hearing :

Witness Name: _____

Position/Title: _____

Witness Type: ☐ Governmental ☐ Non-governmental

Are you representing yourself or an organization? ☐ Self ☐ Organization

If you are representing an organization, please list what entity or entities you are representing:

FOR WITNESSES APPEARING IN A NON-GOVERNMENTAL CAPACITY

Please complete the following fields. If necessary, attach additional sheet(s) to provide more information.

Are you a fiduciary—including, but not limited to, a director, officer, advisor, or resident agent—of any organization or entity that has an interest in the subject matter of the hearing? If so, please list the name of the organization(s) or entities.

Please list any federal grants or contracts (including subgrants or subcontracts) related to the hearing's subject matter that you or the organization(s) you represent have received in the past thirty-six months from the date of the hearing. Include the source and amount of each grant or contract.

Please list any contracts, grants, or payments originating with a foreign government and related to the hearing's subject that you or the organization(s) you represent have received in the past thirty-six months from the date of the hearing. Include the amount and country of origin of each contract or payment.

Please complete the following fields. If necessary, attach additional sheet(s) to provide more information.

- ☐ I have attached a written statement of proposed testimony.
- ☐ I have attached my curriculum vitae or biography.

* Rule XI, clause 2(g)(5), of the U.S. House of Representatives provides:

(5)(A) Each committee shall, to the greatest extent practicable, require witnesses who appear before it to submit in advance written statements of proposed testimony and to limit their initial presentations to the committee to brief summaries thereof.

(B) In the case of a witness appearing in a non-governmental capacity, a written statement of proposed testimony shall include— (i) a curriculum vitae; (ii) a disclosure of any Federal grants or contracts, or contracts, grants, or payments originating with a foreign government, received during the past 36 months by the witness or by an entity represented by the witness and related to the subject matter of the hearing; and (iii) a disclosure of whether the witness is a fiduciary (including, but not limited to, a director, officer, advisor, or resident agent) of any organization or entity that has an interest in the subject matter of the hearing.

(C) The disclosure referred to in subdivision (B)(ii) shall include— (i) the amount and source of each Federal grant (or subgrant thereof) or contract (or subcontract thereof) related to the subject matter of the hearing; and (ii) the amount and country of origin of any payment or contract related to the subject matter of the hearing originating with a foreign government.

(D) Such statements, with appropriate redactions to protect the privacy or security of the witness, shall be made publicly available in electronic form 24 hours before the witness appears to the extent practicable, but not later than one day after the witness appears.

Grant ID	Grant name	Awarded amount
GI-000197	RCPD SUPPLEMENTAL AGREEMENT FOR ALTERNATIVE FUNDING - TA	5,500,000.00
GI-000198	RCPD SUPPLEMENTAL AGREEMENT FOR ALTERNATIVE FUNDING - FA	18,750,000.00
C-44066	MILWAUKEE COUNTY PUETZ ROAD NRCS WETLAND MITIGATION PROJECT	5,000.00
000096	WLFW BLACK DUCK PARTNERSHIP IN NEW JERSEY AND ACROSS DELMARVA (DE, MD, NJ, VA)	348,315.96
C-43624	COORDINATING COVER CROP ADOPTION TO CONSERVE NATURAL RESOURCES (IN, MI)	386,683.27
C-43682	NORTHWEST MINNESOTA LIVESTOCK GRAZING ASSISTANCE AND PLANNING PROGRAM	295,185.00
C-43689	IMPLEMENTING FARM BILL PROGRAMS TO BENEFIT WETLANDS ALONG THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER (MO, IL, KY)	245,690.00
C-43771	KS-270-1 NFWF GRANT 2004.22.075007 KANSAS WETLAND CONSERVATION INITIATIVE	399,859.71
C-43891	INCREASING TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE ON WORKING WETLANDS FOR LOUISIANA SHOREBIRDS	200,000.00
C-44105	USING PREGENERATIVE PRACTICES TO IMPROVE WATER QUALITY AND HABITAT (IL)	263,960.07
C-44275	EXPANDING AGRICULTURAL DIVERSIFICATION AND HABITAT ENHANCEMENT (SD)	201,572.66
C-44390	ACCELERATING WETLAND CONSERVATION FOR BLACK DUCK ON THE DELMARVA PENINSULA (DE, MD, VA)	100,000.00
GI-000037	NFWF - NGPIV XX0013012 - 2501.22.073977	55,000.00
GI-000111	Rotational Grazing Technical Assistance & Planning in the Midwest (MN, MO, WI)	435,682.98
GI-001780	Promoting Forest Management and Agricultural Conservation Practices with Cost Share	1,375,411.10
GI-001781	NFWF - NGPIV XX0013103 - 2501.24.083519	235,000.00
GI-001846	TA Regen Ag & Water Quality Practices (IA)	893,460.91
GI-000015	2021 Tri-State WREP	333,000.00
GI-001933	2022 Tri-State WREP	136,300.00
GI-000017	USDA Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities	2,642,746.00
C-44452	USDA CLIMATE SMART COMMODITY GRANT-PORK BOARD	3,509,677.00
GI-000086	FARM JOURNAL TRUST IN FOOD USDA-CLIMATE SMART COMMODITY SUB-AWARD	18,026,041.00
GI-000182	Working Lands Climate Corps-Interns	303,634.38
GI-001901	SHAWNEE NATIONAL FOREST Cooperative Agreement	21,000.00
000015	LA WRE RESTORATION TASK ORDER NR237217XXXXC018	1,093,696.00
000017	LA WRE RESTORATION TASK ORDER NR237217XXXXC019	950,000.00
000018	LA WRE RESTORATION TASK ORDER NR237217XXXXC015	407,905.85
000021	LA WRE RESTORATION TASK ORDER NR237217XXXXC022	501,941.83
000039	XX0041100 - NR233A750013C005	13,052,946.00
000041	KY NRCS EASEMENT PLANNING, IMPLEMENTATION, & MANAGEMENT TECH ASSISTANCE	538,212.81
000044	NRCS Grassland/Grazing Management Climate SMART-Minnesota TA	767,160.00
000048	NR236424XXXXC003-R. Diener	300,000.00

000049	NR236424XXXXC004 Lueckenhoff, Knudsen	529,337.00
000053	WETLAND RESERVE AND EASEMENT TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND OUTREACH	1,199,613.00
000055	OH CREPS TA to support delivery of wetland & water quality practices	321,969.69
000057	VA TA DELIVERY OF CLIMATE SMART PRACTICES W/I THE WESTERN SHORE OF THE CHESAPEAKE BAY	299,991.39
000069	LA WRE RESTORATION TASK ORDER NR237217XXXXC028	985,758.74
000081	MT0342001 - NR230325XXXXC011 - NGPJV CONSERVATION SCIENCE INTEGRATION	547,844.00
000089	NE-300-1 NRCS WRE RESTORATION 5465261901QX2	283,375.00
000144	NRCS - Prairie Pothole Working Lands Grazing Init.	163,272.00
C-43477	LA WRE RESTORATION TASK ORDER NR227217XXXXC012	754,050.00
C-43498	LA WRE RESTORATION TASK ORDER NR227217XXXXC013	829,903.90
C-43540	PBJJV NRCS OAK PARTNER BIOLOGIST	50,000.00
C-43692	TA MO Wets	473,128.00
C-43714	LA WRE RESTORATION TASK ORDER NR227217XXXXC031	652,153.96
C-43717	COLLABORATE TO INSTALL OR IMPLEMENT STRUCTURAL AND/OR VEGETATIVE RESTORATION PRACTICES ON \	707,800.00
C-43741	CONSERVATION PROGRAM CONTRACT - POWLESS	68,766.00
C-43844	NE-218-1 NRCS WRE 546526001V4Q RESTORATION	163,974.00
C-44245	2022 ACEP RESTORATION ASSISTANCE AGREEMENT	500,000.00
GI-000021	CONJUNCTIVE WATER USE PROTECTS MID-SOUTH AQUIFERS	600,000.00
GI-000023	CONSERVING BIG SKY LANDSCAPES - NRCS 2023	1,746,283.00
GI-000032	Chesapeake Bay Phragmites Control	2,000,000.00
GI-000125	ACEP-IRA-Partnership	462,198.00
GI-000171	NE-344-1 NRCS RCPP-EQIP 2014 826526223ZW	42,097.00
GI-001723	DU Umbrella Agreement	5,922,365.00
GI-001725	KY NRCS Easement Staffing Assistance	403,920.00
GI-001736	Delivery of Improved Grassland and Grazing-SW WI	945,960.00
GI-001737	TA to IL NRCS Providing Easement Program	918,456.56
GI-001754	EQIP PRACTICES CONDINGTON CTY	50,000.00
GI-001769	Scott Cty RCPP-TA Agreement	1,760,000.00
GI-001770	Scott Cty RCPP-FA-LO Agreement	6,000,000.00
GI-001816	2024 DU NRCS WREP	9,659,250.00
GI-001818	MS WRE Task Order NR244423XXXXC147	493,249.73
GI-001824	XX0013101 - NR240325XXXXC008- NGPJV Comms Support	738,717.00
GI-001836	National Agreement	12,000,000.00

GI-001842	NRCS Cooperative Agreement	737,619.94
GI-001879	RCPD Supplement Agreement For Technical Assistance and Financial Assistance for Easment Due Diligenc	1,967,989.75
GM-000008	S LA Climate Smart TA - Rice Stewardship	600,000.00
GM-000009	MS Climate Smart TA in the MS Delta	800,000.00
GI-001848	KY WRE ENGINEERING AGREEMENT	999,731.36
GI-001939	Support Monarch Butterflies on Working Lands (IA)	499,992.26
000087	Colville FS AOPS - Tonata Creek Watershed	199,640.03
C-44088	USFS AOP - STEVENS CREEK	85,043.98
C-44366	ND-126-3 GRANT 21-CS-110111800-005	27,779.00
C-44378	BLACK RAIL HABITAT CREATION AT TIBWIN PLANTATION	150,000.00
GI-000195	Wakeley Lake Impoundment Restoration Project	631,000.00
GI-000211	Migratory Bird Partnership Project	30,000.00
GI-001768	Flyway Forest Habitat Restoration Programming	10,000,000.00
GI-001860	SHAWNEE NATIONAL FOREST SERVICE AGREEMENT	21,000.00

Grant customer	Grantor agency	Start Date
USDA-NRCS		2/8/2024
USDA-NRCS		4/18/2024
WI DNR	USDA-NRCS	2/3/2023
NFWF	USDA-NRCS	1/3/2023
NFWF	USDA-NRCS	6/1/2022
NFWF	USDA-NRCS	7/1/2022
NFWF	USDA-NRCS	7/1/2022
NFWF	USDA-NRCS	6/1/2022
NFWF	USDA-NRCS	7/1/2022
NFWF	USDA-NRCS	11/1/2022
NFWF	USDA-NRCS	11/1/2022
NFWF	USDA-NRCS	7/1/2022
NFWF	USDA-NRCS	6/1/2022
NFWF	USDA-NRCS	11/1/2023
NFWF	USDA-NRCS	5/1/2024
NFWF	USDA-NRCS	6/1/2024
NFWF	USDA-NRCS	5/1/2024
TNC	USDA-NRCS	10/1/2023
TNC	USDA-NRCS	12/31/2024
USA RICE FEDERATION	USDA-NRCS	7/20/2023
NAT'L PORK BOARD	USDA-NRCS	4/19/2023
FARM JOURNAL	USDA-NRCS	1/1/2024
THE CORPS NETWORK	USDA-NRCS	6/15/2024
USDA-USFS		1/19/2024
USDA-NRCS		9/15/2023
USDA-NRCS		9/15/2023
USDA-NRCS		9/30/2023
USDA-NRCS		9/30/2023
USDA-NRCS		8/17/2023
USDA-NRCS		8/24/2023
USDA-NRCS		8/7/2023
USDA-NRCS		9/12/2023

USDA-NRCS	9/12/2023
USDA-NRCS	9/18/2023
USDA-NRCS	9/30/2023
USDA-NRCS	9/27/2023
USDA-NRCS	9/26/2023
USDA-NRCS	9/7/2023
USDA-NRCS	2/23/2023
USDA-NRCS	9/26/2023
USDA-NRCS	9/30/2022
USDA-NRCS	9/30/2022
USDA-NRCS	6/6/2022
USDA-NRCS	8/12/2022
USDA-NRCS	8/19/2022
USDA-NRCS	8/30/2022
USDA-NRCS	8/10/2022
USDA-NRCS	7/1/2022
USDA-NRCS	10/1/2022
USDA-NRCS	3/28/2023
USDA-NRCS	10/1/2023
USDA-NRCS	3/4/2024
USDA-NRCS	5/8/2024
USDA-NRCS	9/27/2022
USDA-NRCS	9/5/2024
USDA-NRCS	9/6/2024
USDA-NRCS	9/23/2024
USDA-NRCS	9/30/2024
USDA-NRCS	8/1/2024
USDA-NRCS	9/20/2024
USDA-NRCS	6/21/2024
USDA-NRCS	12/2/2024
USDA-NRCS	9/23/2024
USDA-NRCS	9/9/2024
USDA-NRCS	1/17/2025

USDA-NRCS	9/1/2024
USDA-NRCS	8/14/2024
USDA-NRCS	9/30/2024
USDA-NRCS	9/30/2024
USDA-FSA	9/30/2024
NFWF	1/1/2025
USDA-USFS	8/22/2023
USDA-USFS	1/30/2023
USDA-USFS	6/1/2022
USDA-USFS	9/26/2022
USDA-USFS	5/29/2024
USDA-USFS	6/27/2023
USDA-USFS	8/15/2024
USDA-USFS	1/30/2024

Testimony of
Chris McLeland

**Before the House Committee on Agriculture Subcommittee on Conservation, Research, and
Biotechnology**

Supporting Farmers, Strengthening Conservation, Sustaining Working Lands”

Washington, D.C.
June 5, 2025

Good morning, Chairman Lucas, Ranking Member Tokuda, and members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for holding this hearing and for the opportunity to testify on my perspectives of voluntary, locally led, incentive-based Farm Bill conservation programs.

My name is Chris McLeland, and I am the Managing Director of Conservation Programs for Ducks Unlimited in the Great Lakes and Atlantic Region. When I'm off the clock, I enjoy spending time on the farm, with my daughters and our cattle. Growing up in a rural community in north-central Missouri, I learned from a young age that agriculture and wildlife conservation were not mutually exclusive activities. In fact, they can very much mutually inclusive and complementary. It has been my passion for agriculture and wildlife conservation that has guided me throughout my career and is a passion that I am working hard to instill in my children.

As a proud partner of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Farm Service Agency (FSA), Ducks Unlimited (DU) has a long history of working with ranchers, farmers, and other private landowners across the country to enhance and restore millions of acres of critical waterfowl and other wildlife habitats. The organization was established in 1937 amid the Dust Bowl and the Great Depression. DU was founded by people who understood the value of wetland resources and bolstered by the passage of the first federal duck stamp in 1934. With more than one million supporters across North America, DU has become the premier organization for wetlands and waterfowl conservation with a mission to conserve, restore, and manage wetlands and associated habitats for the continent's waterfowl, other wildlife, and people. To date, DU has restored and enhanced more than 19-million acres across the continent focusing heavily on the priority landscapes for waterfowl populations.

The voluntary, locally led, incentive-based conservation programs that are authorized and funded through the Farm Bill are the backbone of DU's cooperative conservation work. Many of the remaining wetlands in the United States are on private lands, where most waterfowl are raised, migrate and winter. To further our mission, DU supports agricultural policies that can help American farmers and ranchers be more competitive and successful in meeting demands for food, fiber and energy while conserving soil, water, wetlands, grasslands and forests. The Farm Bill is the most effective tool for conserving wildlife habitats on private land.

DU collaborates with USDA and other partners in helping deliver Farm Bill conservation programs, including the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), Agricultural Conservation Easements Program (ACEP), Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) and the Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) Program. Our focus is not just on the financial assistance dollars delivered for agriculture producers and land stewards for on-the-farm conservation practices, but also as a technical assistance partner working hand-in-hand with USDA and program participants on their lands. We are proud of our ability to deliver quality, science-based assistance to agriculture producers cooperatively with NRCS.

Wetlands in the Farm Bill

The federal flagship wetlands restoration program, ACEP-Wetland Reserve Easement (WRE), is an NRCS program that is popular and oversubscribed. WRE is a voluntary, non-regulatory, incentive-based way for private landowners, farmers and ranchers to protect and restore agricultural lands and wetlands on their property. WRE has multiple benefits and can be tailored to many types of wetland ecosystems, including the prairie potholes (Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota,

Minnesota and Iowa), floodplain wetlands and coastal tidal marshes. Ducks Unlimited provides technical assistance to implement practices on WRE that, for example, restore and manage wetlands to filter pollutants, which naturally leads to water quality improvements.

WRE also provides landowners and producers a financially viable alternative for transitioning farmland with high inputs and low or negative profits to functioning wetlands while continuing to focus investments and production on their more suitable lands as key to sustaining property ownership and promoting generational transition of agriculture and forest lands. I have personally witnessed the impacts on the farm viability and ecological improvements that extend beyond the farm-gate. We see this program as a win-win for farmers and ranchers and our North American waterfowl.

In my home state of Missouri, wetland restoration programs such as WRE have been extremely popular among producers, recreational landowners, and conservation partners alike. Missouri is a state that can experience extreme flood events. Programs like WRE provide an avenue for landowners to restore wetland acres, provide a diverse array of wildlife habitats, create outdoor recreational opportunities, while also reducing operational risk in the form of lost revenue. Through the hard work of partners such as USDA-NRCS, the Missouri Department of Conservation, and groups like Ducks Unlimited, Missouri has restored over 167,000 acres of wetlands through the WRE program.

Using the Lower Mississippi Valley as an example, since 1998, Ducks Unlimited has partnered with NRCS in reforestation and hydrology restoration activities in states from Missouri to Louisiana. In Louisiana alone, DU has helped reforest 52,000 acres of bottomland hardwoods by enrolling these acres in WRE. Prior to WRE, an estimated 80 percent of the bottomland hardwood wetland forests were converted. With Louisiana being one of the most intensive farmed regions in the nation, WRE projects and the restoration of bottomland hardwood forest ecosystems ultimately filter out sediment, nutrients and farm runoff that would otherwise end up in the Mississippi River.

There is also a stewardship component to WRE where NRCS works with landowners to implement conservation practices on older WREs (formerly known as WRP), allowing these lands to continue to provide multiple ecosystem benefits to local communities. One of DU's biggest priorities for the next Farm Bill is to ensure NRCS provides landowners these long-term stewardship opportunities. It is critically important that the program provides these additional tools to landowners to maintain their WRE and retain the associated habitat benefits. In addition, DU has advocated to modify the county cap restriction on WRE. Focused on the more marginal lands, this provision provides flexibility to NRCS allowing more acres in areas where duck habitat is critically important. We are excited, both of these provisions were included in the Farm, Food, and National Security Act (that passed out of the House Agriculture Committee last Congress). Thank you, Chairman Thompson and members of the Committee, for including this critically important language.

Emergency Watershed Protection Program

Building on the success of WRE, the Emergency Watershed Protection Program incorporates floodplain easements as an alternative tool to landowners, farmers and ranchers who seek long-term protection of life and property and avoid future agriculture crop losses after devastating natural disasters. It is proven that wetlands provide flood control, slowing the flow of water and allowing it to replenish the ground water supply and reduce flood damage in areas downstream. DU partners with NRCS to implement voluntary floodplain easements to restore floodplains, forests, or

conservation practices to pre-disaster conditions. We firmly believe USDA should leverage the easement purchase by adding habitat value similar to those provided by the WRE. For minimal additional restoration investment, we can see substantial improvement in hydrology, habitat quality and wildlife usage of these easements that are positioned in our most critical flyways.

EWP has been a critically important program along our country's big river systems, with the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers being no exception. An example of EWP in action is the Dogtooth Bend project. Dogtooth Bend is a 17,000-acre peninsula in Southwest Illinois created by a meander of the Mississippi River. Its fertile soils in the Mississippi floodplain have made it attractive for row crop agriculture. To prevent flooding a levee system was completed around 1943 and stood until the great flood of 1993. The levee was rebuilt but flooding continued repeatedly, through the 2010s, culminating in a major event in 2019 that deposited massive amounts of sediment across the peninsula. The EWPP-FPE Easements (~2600 acres) were critical to helping landowners recover from this disaster as the site is no longer economically viable to farm.

Again, the Farm, Food and National Security Act, included DU's priority of language that promotes management and restoration of floodplain easements, as well as restoring the land for the long-term health of the watershed.

Regional Conservation Partnership Program

Mr. Lucas as you well know, the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) which was originally authorized when you were Chair of the Committee has been a resounding success. As you well know, the rice industry's symbiotic relationship with waterfowl led DU to a historic partnership with USA Rice, called the Rice Stewardship Partnership (RSP), in 2013. While both organizations have separate missions and methods, we have managed to collaborate and develop goals for our Partnership, including work on RCPP where our focus is to work with producers to maintain lands in agriculture production while managing those acres to supplement wildlife food and cover, improve water quality and promote water conserving practices.

The Rice Stewardship Partnership's RCPP projects have pulled together nearly one hundred diverse partners to help implement their goals, communicate successes, and ultimately share the cost of investment in working lands conservation programs. The Rice Stewardship Partnership has had phenomenal success in delivering on-the-ground conservation to rice farmers. Since the creation of RCPP in the 2014 Farm Bill, the RSP has beneficially impacted over 800,000 acres of rice and rice rotation ground and provided over \$100 million in additional conservation funding. From Missouri to Texas and California in the west, America's rice producers have literally filled the void in critical wildlife habitat needs by adapting their operations to include wildlife benefiting water and cover management practices,

For the upcoming Farm Bill, Ducks Unlimited would note the complexity plaguing RCPP and its impact on the long-term viability of a crucial partnership program to rice farmers. Congress should work to address barriers for partners including the overly detailed and complicated application process, multiple layered agreements, the length of time it takes to finalize an agreement, and burdensome accounting for technical assistance within the agreements. Simplifying RCPP will help deliver more timely assistance to producers. While administrative barriers can present unnecessary obstacles and costs for partners, Ducks Unlimited asks Congress to provide thoughtful and targeted solutions that allow the program to successfully function as it has for nearly a decade without the overly bureaucratic process that has plagued the program over the last

several years. The House Agriculture Committee worked tirelessly last Congress to address these concerns in the Farm, Food, and National Security Act. We thank you for your thoughtful attention to these concerns and encourage Congress to support these provisions in the Farm Bill.

CRP

I must also mention another important voluntary conservation program at USDA under the Farm Service Agency, CRP. CRP is a prominent component of the farm safety net by providing farmers and ranchers with financial options while improving soil health, enhancing water quality, and supporting wildlife habitat, in particular nesting cover. Ducks Unlimited primarily provides technical assistance to landowners and producers who enroll in the CRP Continuous sign up. This sign up allows eligible land to be enrolled at any time, targeting high-priority conservation practices such as buffer strips, riparian buffers, and wetlands.

We thank FSA and Administrator Beam for opening CRP General and Continuous enrollment and appreciate the committee's efforts in addressing policies in last Congress' Farm Bill that promote locally led activities, reinstate management tool options like mid-contract management, and increase rental rate payments for practices under Continuous CRP and State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE).

Working Lands Programs

Working lands programs, like the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), serve as economic drivers and provide farmers and ranchers with the support they need when considering conservation plans on their land. EQIP is one of the largest conservation programs within the Farm Bill. It helps producers maintain working agricultural lands and improve farm infrastructure like fencing, water irrigation, post-harvest flooding and more. We at Ducks Unlimited support working lands programs as a way to retain critically important habitats and to sustain working farms and ranches.

Technical Assistance

Across all the Farm Bill programs and all of USDA's conservation programs, I have discussed our partnership with NRCS in providing technical assistance in advance of, and when, delivering these programs. From program outreach to conservation planning, conservation practice design, implementation and evaluation, this staff assistance provided directly to agriculture producers is essential to the success and long-term sustainability of a producer's conservation system. We are concerned about the recent downsizing and loss of personnel in the field, on the front lines with our private land stewards. As USDA realigns their personnel resources and program policies, DU will work alongside our NRCS colleagues and producers to fill gaps as this process moves forward. While we have resources to contribute in support, the technical assistance component of each of the farm bill programs is as essential as the financial assistance provided. We ask that you continue to provide for sound, science-driven, field-based technical assistance directed at the field level to each participating agriculture producer.

Conclusion

Ducks Unlimited is a proud partner with NRCS and the passionate farmers, ranchers and landowners who invest their own financial resources to bring these Farm Bill conservation programs to their land. DU's mission to conserve, restore and maintain wetlands and waterfowl habitat would not be possible without the voluntary Farm Bill conservation programs and our partnerships with many in the agricultural industry. I encourage Congress to pass a Farm Bill that

supports strong funding levels for conservation programs, maintains the integrity of the conservation programs and sustains wildlife and the farm economy.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and share my perspectives on the Farm Bill conservation programs.