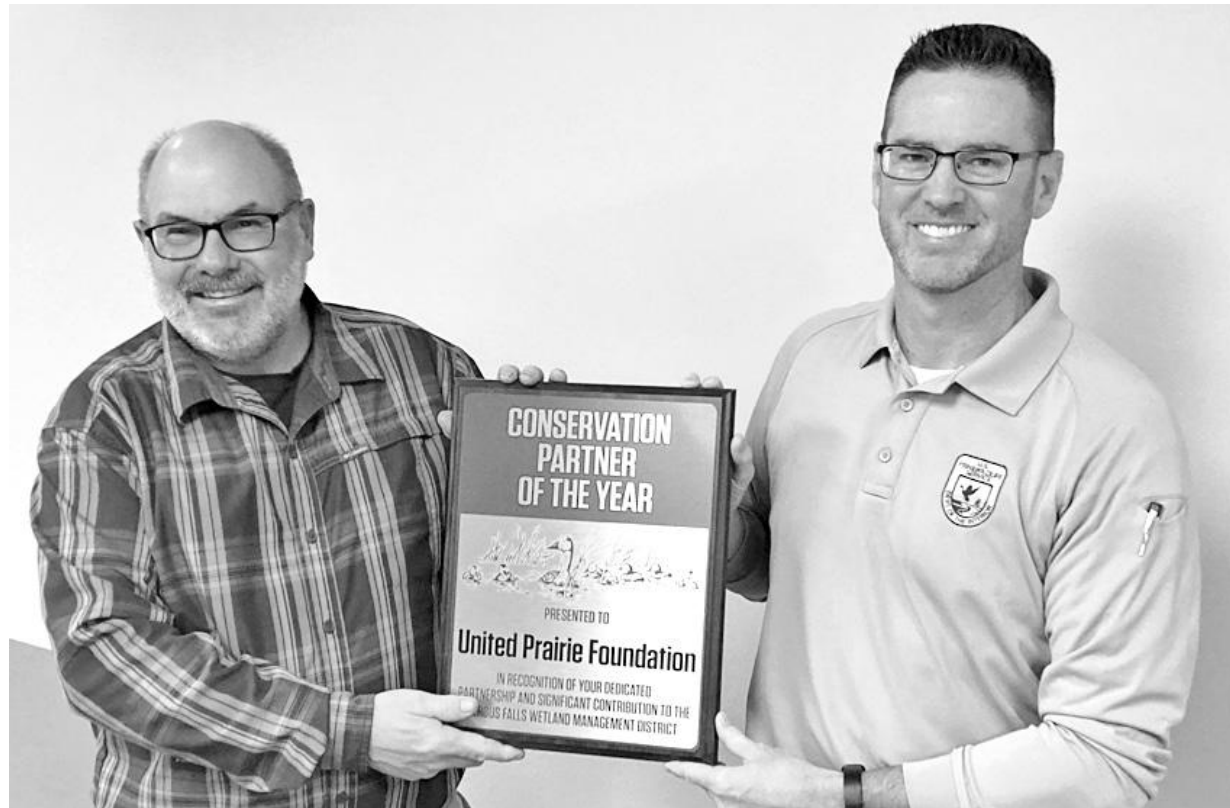


United Prairie Foundation Receives Recognition



John DeVries, left, receiving the award from Neil Powers, U.S Fish and Wildlife district manager. Credit for the photo goes to Chad Raitz/USFWS.

The Fergus Falls Wetland Management District, operated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, recently honored United Prairie Foundation with the fourth annual Conservation Partner of the Year Award.

The award celebrates individual and organizational efforts in promoting and providing conservation through effective partnership efforts with the district. Recipients must have made significant and visible contributions to conservation within the district's five county jurisdiction in western Minnesota (Otter Tail, Wilkin, Wadena, Grant, and Douglas).

"We have the amazing benefit of working with many dedicated partners and individuals that help us on a recurring basis to accomplish conservation priorities," stated district manager Neil Powers. "We are shining the spotlight on United Prairie Foundation for its steadfast participation in conservation efforts in 2022 while also cultivating

positive relationships with our partners."

"Since 2012 when we first partnered with United Prairie Foundation, they have been instrumental in invasive species removal projects on 12 waterfowl production areas totaling 2,130 acres. In addition, John DeVries has worked with the Fergus Falls district staff to determine the most effective and efficient ways of adding plant diversity to monoculture stands of warm season grasses on Townsend and Ridgeway Waterfowl Production Areas," stated Brandon Peterson, maintenance worker for the district.

Currently, DeVries is working on another project to increase plant diversity on old grass dominant stands on Busko and Knollwood Waterfowl Production Areas in an effort to support a broad range of species ranging from pollinators to grassland nesting birds and other wildlife. United Prairie Foundation has volunteered countless hours to the Fergus Falls district's seed

harvest program, Prairie Wetlands Learning Center seed taping days, and milkweed seed packets for monarch butterfly taggers and other visitors.

"United Prairie Foundation is one of our biggest partners when it comes to harvesting prairie seed," Peterson said. Over the years, United Prairie Foundation has assisted in harvesting around 35,000 pounds of seed in partnership with Fergus Falls district staff and Minnesota Department of Natural Resources staff. Harvested seed supports habitat restoration projects on other tracts within the district.

"John DeVries with United Prairie Foundation is one of the most passionate people I have met in the field of prairie restoration. He never stops trying to learn about prairie and how he can make it better. He has big ideas and a willingness to work hard and try new things," Peterson added.

Submitted by Fergus Falls Wetland Management District.

Wilkin County Soil And Water Group Visits St. Paul



State Representative Jeff Backer, R-Browns Valley, visited with a group of folks from the Wilkin County Soil and Water Conservation District last week at his office in St. Paul. They discussed a variety of topics related to clean water including the various conservation programs they offer in Wilkin County. Pictured from left to right, Rep. Backer, Kim Melton, Craig Lingen, and Kyle Gowin.

Landowners Need To Plan Ahead For Spring Burning

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources encourages Minnesotans who intend to burn vegetative debris – such as brush, grass, leaves, and untreated lumber – during spring clean-up to start planning now. The best time to burn vegetative debris is when there is ample snow on the ground, rather than later in the spring when wildfire risk is high due to brown grass and low humidity.

Every spring, burning permit restrictions are put in place after the snow melts. Restrictions remain in place until vegetation begins to "green up" and fire risk declines.

"Vegetative debris burn piles

are the number one cause of wildfires in Minnesota," said Karen Harrison, DNR statewide wildfire prevention specialist. "Chipping and composting are the best options and are encouraged as an alternative to burning whenever possible."

If vegetative debris is burned, all fires must be supervised and put out by drowning with plenty of water or snow, stirring and repeating until cold.

If a fire does rekindle or escape, the person who set it is liable for any damages and wildfire suppression costs. It is illegal to burn garbage, including chemically treated or painted lumber, tires, and plastics.

Visit the DNR's guide on composting for woodland owners (mndnr.gov/wildfire/prevention/debris-composting.html) for more information on alternatives to burning vegetative debris. For information and daily updates on current fire risk and open burning restrictions, visit the statewide fire danger and burning restrictions page of the DNR website (mndnr.gov/BurnRestrictions).



Local Area Bald Eagles Are Guarding Nests

A female bald eagle stretches her wings and rolls her eggs over before settling back down on her nest to incubate her eggs. Eagles are very early nesters, usually occupying a nest by early March. This year has been somewhat unusual for some unknown reason and eagles are on nests all over Minnesota beginning in February.

There's nothing wrong with that if the eggs can be kept warm enough so they don't freeze. That was the misfortune of a bald eagle who was being watched and photographed on the website of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. The DNR guys got a very unique picture of the nest in February with only the white head of the eagle sticking out of the snow that covered her and the nest. In that case at least one of the eggs froze and broke.

The bald eagle pictured here is another of those rare birds that is relatively easy to get a picture of. This nest is located about a dozen miles east of Barnesville on the south side of Highway 34, just across the road from the old Russel Lund farmstead.

The nest is located in a tree only a few feet off the busy highway and is seen by a lot of commuters. The nest replaces a nest that was on the north side of the road for a number of years but has been abandoned. The spring of 2022 was the first year that this nest was occupied but it provided no young eaglets last year. Here's hoping the national birds have better luck this nesting season.

That Highway 34 nest is just one of several active nests in the region. The easily visible nest replaces a nest that was probably the most photographed in the State of Minnesota for several years. That nest was located about a mile south of Lawndale between Barnesville and Rothsay. The nest had an incredible number of young eagles hatch and grow to adulthood from that single spot.

That huge nest, which got a little bigger each and every year blew down in a severe windstorm about five years ago. The eagles that used the nest did not move far, only a few hundred yards to east to another dead tree, but they are much more difficult to spy on now. There is another active nest in a tree line between Barnesville and Downer. There is a fourth active bald eagle nest near the Rollag towers.



A female bald eagle stretches her flight feathers, takes a few minutes off the nest and then rotates the eggs in the nest. She then settles down for a long wait as she incubates the eggs. The first egg will hatch in about 35 days. The second egg will hatch three or four days later. If there is a third egg, she could be on the nest for at long as six to seven weeks.

There are also a number of stick nests located high atop many of the high voltage electrical towers around the area. Those are osprey nests and not eagle's nests. Which is kind of a contradiction in terms since an osprey is a fish eagle, just not a bald eagle. Osprey's are actually more fun to watch because they are hunters and dive on fish and small animals. Bald eagles are more like pretty buzzards, doing most of their fine dining on carrion and road kills.

Bald eagles are our national bird and they are fun to watch. They have come back from near extinction after the insecticide DDT was outlawed. But they really aren't very good or caring parents.

The female will usually lay two and sometimes three eggs in a nest. She begins to incubate the eggs as soon as they are laid. That means that the first eaglet hatched is two or three days older than the second eaglet. The third eaglet, if it hatches, is as much as a week behind the other birds in the nest.

That means when the parent birds return with food to the nest, the oldest eaglet muscles his way to the head of the chow line every time. The third eaglet will many times starve to death as it is pushed out of

the way when the groceries arrive.

Or, if the parent birds are not bringing home enough grub and the eaglets get hungry, they are not above eating their sibling. All good protein don't you know.

Mama Bald Eagle may well take care of this situation before it becomes a situation. If she feels like she has been incubating eggs long enough and there are already a couple of birds in the nest, she may just push the third egg, which is just about ready to hatch, out of the nest. Problem solved.

Typically a pair of bald eagles will raise one, perhaps two eaglets to maturity. It is very rare to have that third eaglet survive. But if the hunting is easy, the birds have been known to raise triplets. The Lawndale bald eagles pulled off that stunt a few years ago.

The parent eagles will continue to bring food to their hungry offspring as long as they can find it. That's usually not a big trick most springs. There are usually enough critters squished on the highways to properly feed the family.

The young birds are encouraged to hop up on the edge of the nest and begin exercising their wings early in life. By late July there are

flight lessons on the agenda. This is a tricky time of life for a young eagle. If he gets this flying business down pat in the first few lessons, he's home free. He can now learn to scavenge for a meal with his parents.

If he's not so lucky and goes tumbling to the ground, well he might make it and he might not. The parent birds may bring him a few meals on the ground. The young bird may walk back up the tree using his talons to get back to the nest. But it is a dangerous world down there on the ground. There are skunks, raccoons, mink, otters and an occasional illegal, undocumented immigrant that eat young eagles.

By the end of August, family time is over. The parent birds have taught the fledgling everything they know. Now he is on his own. Hit the bricks kid.

And he won't be welcomed back home. Not even for holidays, birthdays or special occasions. Bald eagles are very territorial and will not tolerate other birds of prey in their territory, not even their own

kin. The young birds will soon find out that it's a dangerous world out there with high line poles and wires and fast moving vehicles whizzing by as they dine on a dead deer carcass. But some will make it.

Mom and Pop will take the fall and most of the winter months off and will begin the process again in the cold months of February and March nest year. Bald eagles mate for life. If one or the other of the parent birds dies or is killed, the survivor will seldom choose another mate. About the only exception to that is young birds may take another mate. Older birds, almost never.

The bald eagles can live as long as 20 to 30 years in the wild and even longer than that in captivity. They are usually about five years old when they reach maturity. It takes them that long to develop their distinctive white heads and tails.

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While Mom takes care of incubating the eggs, Pop finds a comfortable perch in a nearby tree. This is a slack time for him. As soon as the youngsters are hatched, he and his mate will spend every waking hour looking for food for themselves and their eaglets. It is somewhat of a rarity in the wild kingdom but both male and female bald eagles have identical marking, white heads and tails with dark chestnut barred body feathers. The only way to really tell them apart is if they are together. The female is always the larger of the two birds and the one who does the deciding when it comes to pairing up for the rest of their lives.