

Presented Info

Lazy K Marsh: Four Years of Habitat Enhancement for Wetland-Dependent Wildlife at a Constructed Marsh in Teton Valley

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Abstract: Lazy K Marsh was constructed in 1999 to enhance habitat for wetland dependent wildlife in Teton Valley, Idaho. The project received broad financial support because of the unique, sensitive and threatened wildlife resources being targeted. Teton Valley's 27,000 acres of wetlands are home to fall staging sandhill cranes (*Grus canadensis*), breeding long-billed curlew (*Numenius americanus*), wintering trumpeter swans (*Cygnus buccinator*), short-eared owls (*Asio flammeus*) and large concentrations of migrating waterfowl including pintails (*Anas acuta*). Our primary goal was to create waterfowl brood-rearing and shorebird habitat. Secondary goals included establishing dense nesting cover for resident waterfowl and food plots for spring migrating sandhill cranes. Revegetating the project area was daunting with nearly 30 ac. of constructed marsh. We developed cost-effective techniques for establishing emergent marsh, sub-merged aquatic and upland grass communities in areas historically used for livestock grazing. Alkali soils, aggressive introduced pasture grasses and noxious weeds compounded the problem. Initial revegetation efforts consisted of planting almost 10,000 native wetland plugs. We drill-seeded disturbed uplands (including the dike) with a mix of native grasses and forbs. Wildlife herbivory mostly by Canada geese was the major impediment to achieving revegetation success. A constructed peninsula was particularly difficult to revegetate in this regard. Waterfowl concentrated on the peninsula and kept it mowed down to bare soil, increasing soil erosion and weed invasion by Canada thistle (*Cirsium arvense*). After many failed plantings we enclosed the peninsula with snow fencing in 2002 and replanted. Pre-vegetated coconut matting was used to stabilize soils on the windward side and proved extremely effective. Plant species selection, planting techniques, weed control and herbivory control were the most important elements of our success. Lazy K Marsh has become a local success story for wetland enhancement in the Intermountain West.

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