



Contact: Thom Soule
Tel. 701-387-4420
Email:souletp@bektel.com

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FERGUS FALLS FISH & GAME CLUB RECEIVES CONSERVATION AWARD FROM MINNESOTA CHAPTER OF THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY

DULUTH, Minnesota (February 18th, 2015)- **The FERGUS FALLS FISH & GAME CLUB** (FFF&GC) received the Minnesota Chapter of The Wildlife Society's **Conservation Award** at its annual meeting in Duluth, MN. Mick Siems and Doug Hettke accepted the Award on behalf of the Club. The Wildlife Society is a professional organization dedicated to excellence in wildlife stewardship through science and education. Our mission is to represent and serve wildlife professionals—the scientists, technicians, students and practitioners actively working to study, manage, and conserve native and desired non-native wildlife and their habitats worldwide.

First presented in 1985 **The Conservation Award** recognizes individuals, organizations or institutions that have demonstrated outstanding commitment to the conservation of Minnesota's natural resources. The FFF&GC received this Award for being at forefront of *in the trenches*, wildlife conservation for over nine decades. The Club joins 29 previous recipients who continue a commitment to make Minnesota a better place to live now and into the future.

Founded in 1920 the club's initial purpose was supporting game wardens in enforcing game and fish laws. They were soon stocking game fish, raising and releasing waterfowl, and feeding wildlife during severe winters. By the end of WW II, however the Club had gotten the message on the importance of habitat.

Instrumental in re-establishing giant Canada geese to West Central Minnesota during the 1960s the Club has always recognized the value of working with federal, state and local conservation agencies within their community. Since its founding the club's members have kept habitat restoration, protection, and management as its core values.

As the decade ended the Club adopted environmental education as one of its highest priorities. By the early 1970s, they were hosting school events, developing slide shows and providing speakers. Working with the Regional Environmental Education Council, the events were tailored for specific audiences and reached K-12 school classes as well as adults.

They soon recognized the need for a local environmental learning center. Keeping habitat restoration, protection, and management as its core values the Club began two decades of proposals, obstacles, setbacks, and near resignation that it would be an unfulfilled dream until

they were able to forge a dynamic partnership with the Fish and Wildlife Service, Friends of the Prairie Wetland Learning Center and the city of Fergus Falls.

Today the work of the Fergus Falls Fish and Game Club reflects both its deep roots and its recognition of today's needs and opportunities:

- The club owns 1100 acres of wildlife habitat, all open to public use and enjoyment.
- They have assisted the DNR and FWS with the acquisition of 3,000 acres of wildlife habitat.
- They install and maintain mallard "hen houses".
- They restore wetlands, establish upland nesting cover, and fund winter food plots.
- Working with volunteers, youth, and parents, they build and distribute hundreds of bluebird and wood duck houses annually.
- Conservation education is still front and center for club members.
 - In addition to continued support of the Prairie Wetlands Learning Center, the club manages interpretative trails in native prairie on their One Mile Nature Area that is within the city limits of Fergus Falls.
 - They sponsor youth fishing days in winter and summer, senior citizen fishing outings, firearms safety classes, regional scouting programs, and school science and nature classes.
 - They support the Minnesota Waterfowl Association's Woodie Camp,
 - And they own the Conservation building on the Otter Tail County fairgrounds.
- The club is an active participant in the Outdoor Heritage Fund's Conservation Legacy Grant Program. It has completed six grants focused on wetland, grassland restoration and tree removal for over \$270,000. The grants have contributed to the completion of at least 50 acres of restored wetlands and the restoration or enhancement of over 400 acres of grassland.

The Fergus Falls Fish and Game Club was recognized:

- By the DNR in 2001 with the Golden 50 Award as one of the top 50 organizations and individuals that work to promote acquisition of Wildlife Management Areas.
- As the 2011 West Otter Tail County Conservationist of the Year by the West Otter Tail Soil and Water Conservation District.



Photo Caption: FFF&GC member Doug Hedtke (center) and President Mick Siems (right) receive the 2014 MNTWS Conservation Award from Chapter President Steve Windels (left).