

Best Practice

Conservation and Land Donation

CONTACT

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THE PRACTICE

In 2006, the Rural Municipality (RM) of St. Andrews donated 656 acres of wetland to Ducks Unlimited Canada. The donation consisted of a large natural basin located in the Rural Municipality (RM) of St. Andrews that catches runoff in spring and often dries up in summer.

If the donation would not have happened, the RM would have been stuck with a parcel of land which brought in no tax dollars and a potentially growing weed problem. By thinking creatively and adopting a non-traditional practice, the RM partnered with DUC and solved both issues.

THE PROCESS

In 2006, the Rural Municipality (RM) of St. Andrews donated 656 acres of wetland to Ducks Unlimited Canada. The donation consisted of a large natural basin located in the Rural Municipality (RM) of St. Andrews that catches runoff in spring and often dries up in summer.

Initially the property was privately owned and the landowners attempted to crop the land in dry periods however, the land was only dry enough once every few years to allow cultivation and cropping. Even when the land was cropped it was unproductive due to salinity. Prior to the donation the property was overrun with weeds such as kochia, foxtail barley due to the occasional cultivation followed by periods of flooding. As a result of these issues the landowner turned the property over to the RM rather than pay the taxes on the "agriculturally unproductive" property. This left the RM with no revenue from the property and weed and salinity problems to address before they spread to adjacent land. The RM realized that something needed to be done with the property to address these issues but had neither time nor money to dedicate to the project. When the RM tendered the land to the public and when no offers were received, the RM and Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) began discussing options on how to facilitate a solution that would benefit both of the parties involved.

DUC felt the land was worthwhile habitat, but had no capital available for the purchase. DUC biologist Kelly Rempel and the St. Andrews council began looking at other options. In the end, the two decided that donating of the 656 acres to DUC would be the best option. The RM donated the land at a value of \$60,000 and DUC became responsible for the property's future management and taxes.

Both parties were motivated in looking at a different way to address this problem as both were without capital to spend on restoration (the RM) or purchase (DUC) of the land. The partnership allows the RM to shed the burden of managing the property and provides tax revenue while DUC gains a valuable piece of property that will continue to provide waterfowl habitat for generations to come. Going forward DUC will pay taxes to the RM as any other landowner while ensuring the land slowly returns to its natural state as a shallow seasonal wetland.

THE RESULTS

The result of the project was an emerging partnership between DUC and the RM of St. Andrews that allows this property to return to its natural state. In its natural state the property will provide ecological goods and services such as habitat for waterfowl and wildlife, water filtering and recharge as well as carbon sequestration. While there has been no formal evaluation performed, Kelly Rempel, the DUC staff member who is involved in management of the property can see the change each season. With time and care from Mother Nature, both parties realize the land will return to its natural state and feel the new purpose given to this property will provide lasting benefits for conservation and agriculture.

LESSONS LEARNED

The lesson learned in this process is a shift in the paradigm that the “highest and best” use for all land must be tied to agricultural production. This partnership clearly shows that in some instances land may be better suited to producing other less traditionally recognized goods and services. DUC and the RM of St. Andrews would like to remind other organizations hearing of this partnership that conservation and agriculture can work hand in hand, providing long lasting benefits for all of society.