

Migratory Bird SAFE



Photo: NGPC



Presentation Overview



- What is a playa?
- Why do we need to restore playas?
- Overview of Migratory Bird SAFE program
- What is the restoration process?
- Partner involvement



Disclaimer

I do not represent the FSA, NRCS, and USDA.

All the information presented here is my best understanding of the program and its value/context in Nebraska.

What's a Playa?



"Boy, these playas would be much more impressive if they had water in them."

- Unattributed quote

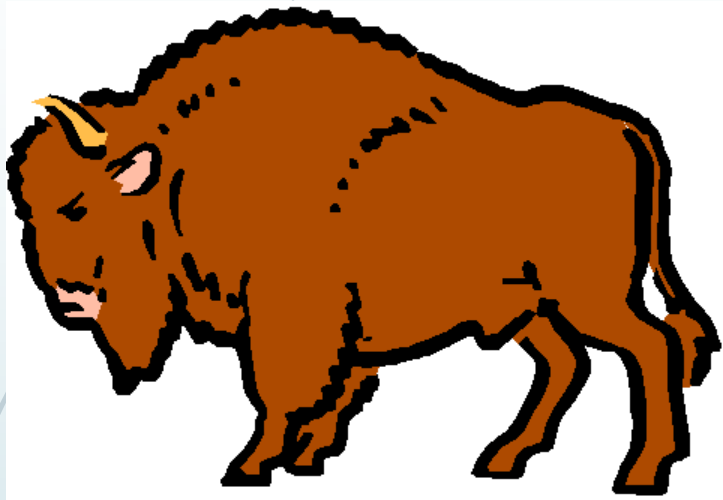
- Shallow seasonal wetlands
- Inundated only occasionally
 - Variable wet/dry cycle
- Hydric soils and obligate wetland spp
- **Usually** isolated - filled by runoff and precipitation
- Clay-lined restrictive layer, often "pan-shaped" basin
 - Fillmore, Lodgepole, and Scott soils

What makes a Playa?

- ▶ Potentially differs by region
- ▶ Multiple theories
 - ▶ Wind deflation
 - ▶ “Lunettes”
 - ▶ Herbivory
 - ▶ Buffalo wallows
 - ▶ Fire
 - ▶ Water erosion
 - ▶ Soil chemistry
 - ▶ Dissolution of carbonates and subsidence
 - ▶ ...Meteorites?...

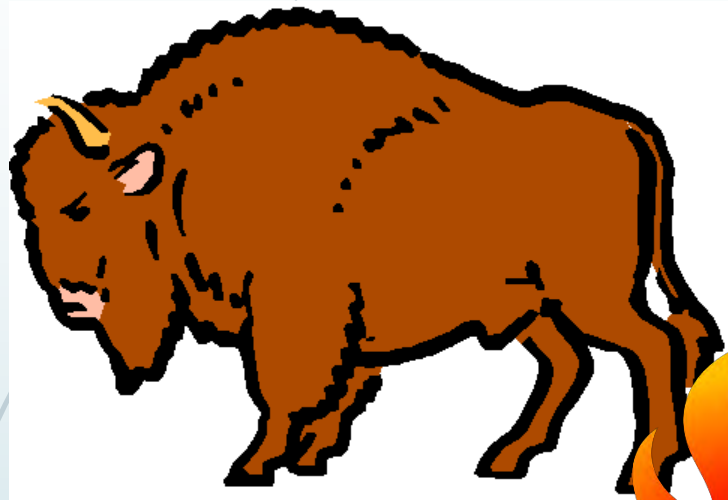


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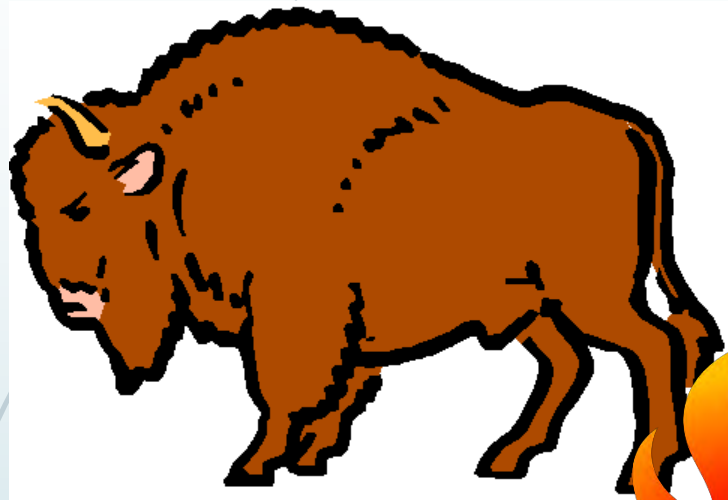
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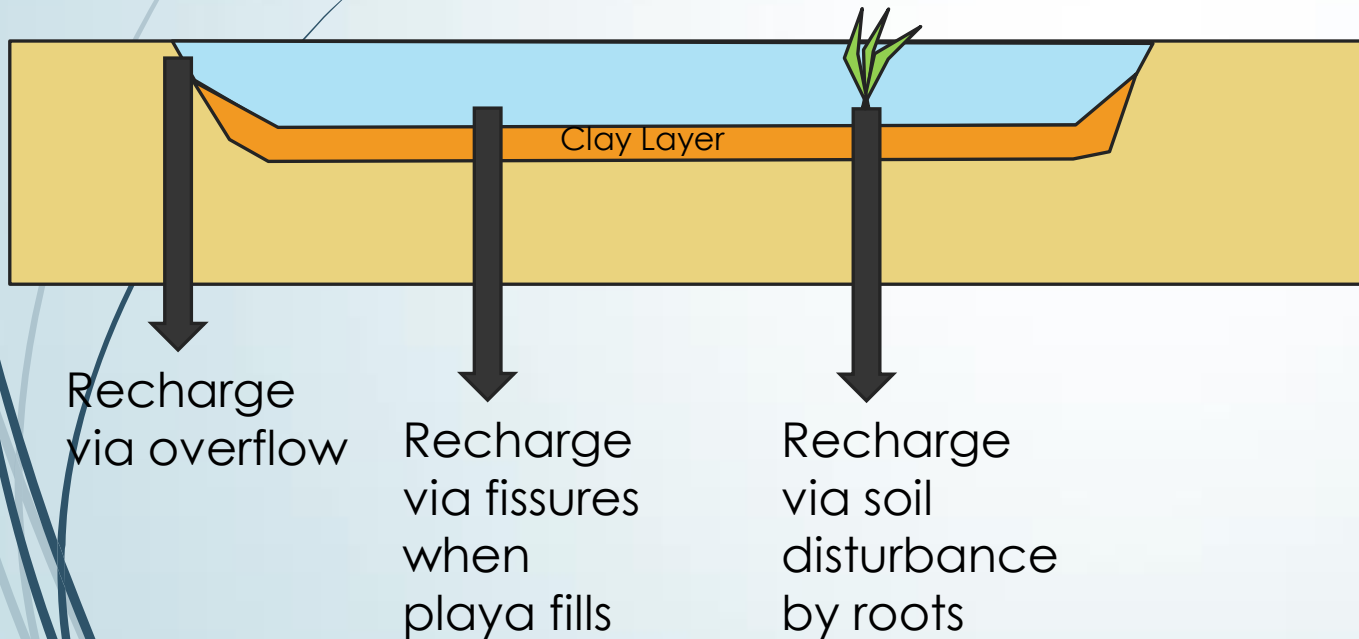
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Why Do Playas Matter?



- Recharge wetlands for Ogallala aquifer
- Flood/runoff control
- Water quality
- Forage production
- Recreation
- ... and wildlife!

Why Do Playas Matter (to wildlife)?



- Diverse and highly productive
 - Plants
 - Southern Great Plains: 346 vascular plants and 27 algae species
 - Rainwater Basin: 212 vascular plants
 - Invertebrates
 - 170 taxa of macroinvertebrates
 - Extremely high abundance, tied to variable/limited hydroperiod

Why Do Playas Matter (to wildlife)?



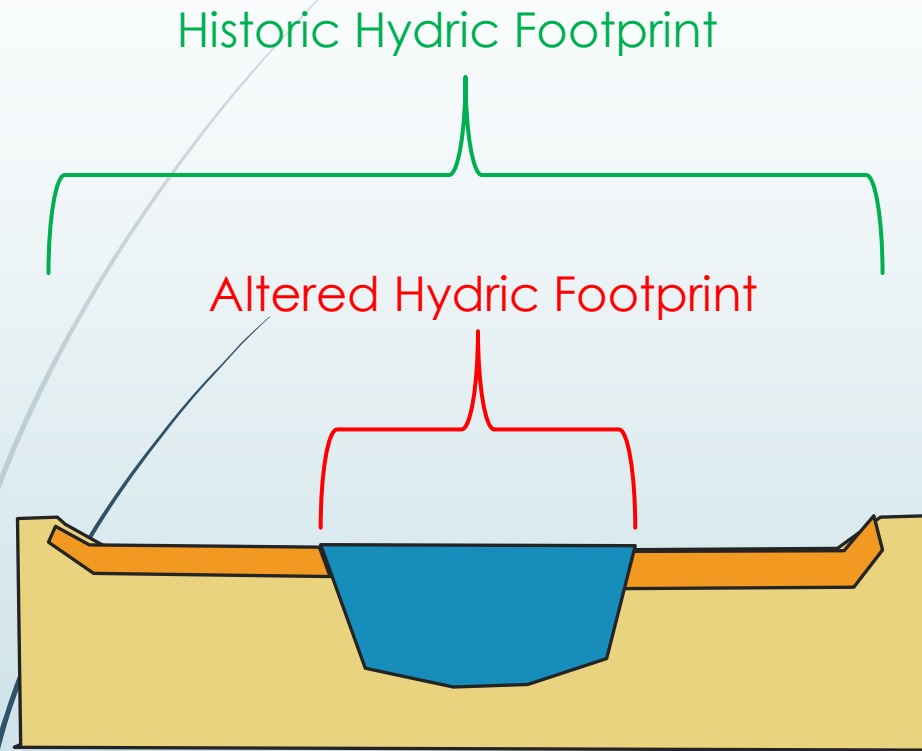
- Important for avian communities
 - 176 species associated with Rainwater Basin playas
 - Stop-over for migratory waterfowl and shorebirds
 - Better habitat, better body condition
 - Brood rearing and nesting habitat
 - Potentially most important habitat for waterfowl in the Central Flyway
- Important for amphibian life cycles and other non-avian spp

What's Wrong With Our Playas?



- ▶ Most playas occur in areas of intensive agriculture
 - ▶ Sedimentation
 - ▶ "Pitting"
- ▶ These modifications alter the natural hydrological function of a playa
 - ▶ Altered hydroperiod
 - ▶ Reduced plant/invertebrate diversity
 - ▶ Reduced recharge to aquifer

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Migratory Bird SAFE

- ▶ So lets talk about the program...
- ▶ Actually “Migratory Bird, Butterfly, and Pollinator Habitat SAFE (CP38B)”
 - ▶ We’ll just call it Migratory Bird SAFE



Migratory Bird SAFE

- Proposed as a multi-state SAFE in 2014 by the Playa Lakes Joint Venture and Rainwater Basin Joint Venture
- Authorized by the FSA National Office in January 2017
- Acres split evenly between Kansas and Nebraska
 - Kansas: 10,000 acres
 - Nebraska: 10,000 acres



Migratory Bird SAFE – Signup Process

- Migratory Bird SAFE is a Continuous CRP, and applications can be made at any time
- A wetland determination is not needed to sign up
- Offers are batched within a sign up period
- Batched offers compete against one another for funding



Migratory Bird SAFE – Signup Process

- Reverse Auction process is used for offers:
 - Landowner offers an annual rental rate they would accept to enroll a tract
 - Annual rental rates capped at \$300/ac
- Migratory Bird SAFE not eligible for SIPs (signup incentive payments)

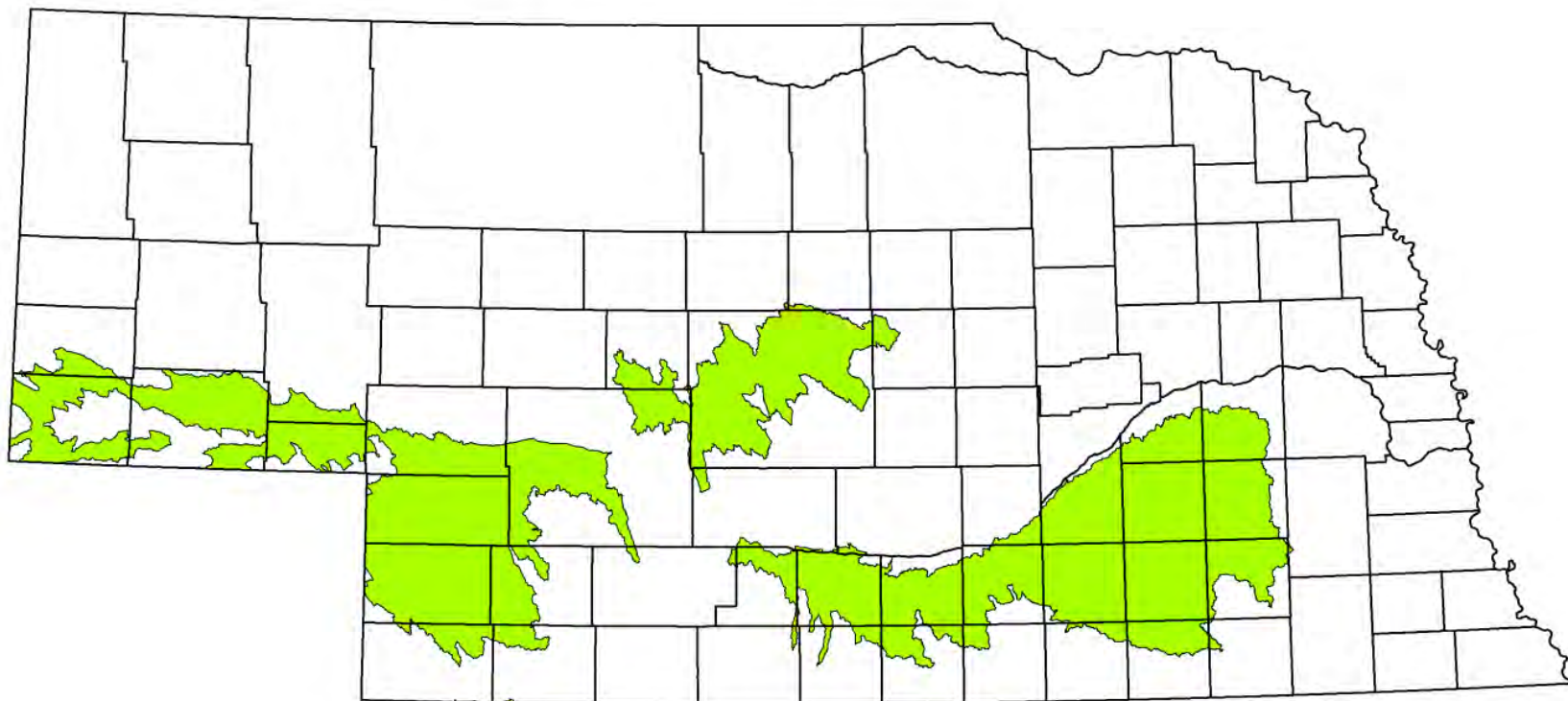


Migratory Bird SAFE – Eligibility


- How do I sign up for Migratory Bird SAFE?
 - In order to be eligible playa hydrology must be restored to the full extent both feasible and practical (as determined by NRCS)
 - 50% cost-share available (additional cost share may be available through partners)
 - Must be within eligible wetland areas



Migratory Bird State Acres For wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) Eligible Areas of Nebraska



Eligible Wetland Areas

 High Playa Wetland Density HUCs



0 35 70 105 140
Miles



Produced by the Rainwater Basin
Joint Venture, Grand Island, NE

Migratory Bird SAFE

Eligible in parts of the following 42 counties:

Adams	Banner	Blaine	Buffalo
Butler	Chase	Cheyenne	Clay
Custer	Dawson	Deuel	Dundy
Fillmore	Franklin	Frontier	Furnas
Garden	Gosper	Hall	Hamilton
Harlan	Hayes	Hitchcock	Jefferson
Kearney	Keith	Kimball	Lancaster
Lincoln	Logan	Loup	Morrill
Nuckolls	Perkins	Phelps	Polk
Saline	Seward	Thayer	Valley
Webster	York		



Migratory Bird SAFE – Typical “Roadmap”

- Outreach
- Cooperator meets with NRCS/FSA staff
 - Program details and potential cost share info
- Offer made
- Offers ranked/accepted or rejected
- Site visits/soil surveys conducted



Migratory Bird SAFE – Typical “Roadmap”

- Conservation Plan developed
- Producer signs CRP contract
- Partner involvement formalized
- Conservation Plan executed
 - Phase 1. Dirtwork
 - Restores the playa's function
 - Phase 2. Vegetation buffer
 - Conserves the playa's function



Migratory Bird SAFE – Dirtwork

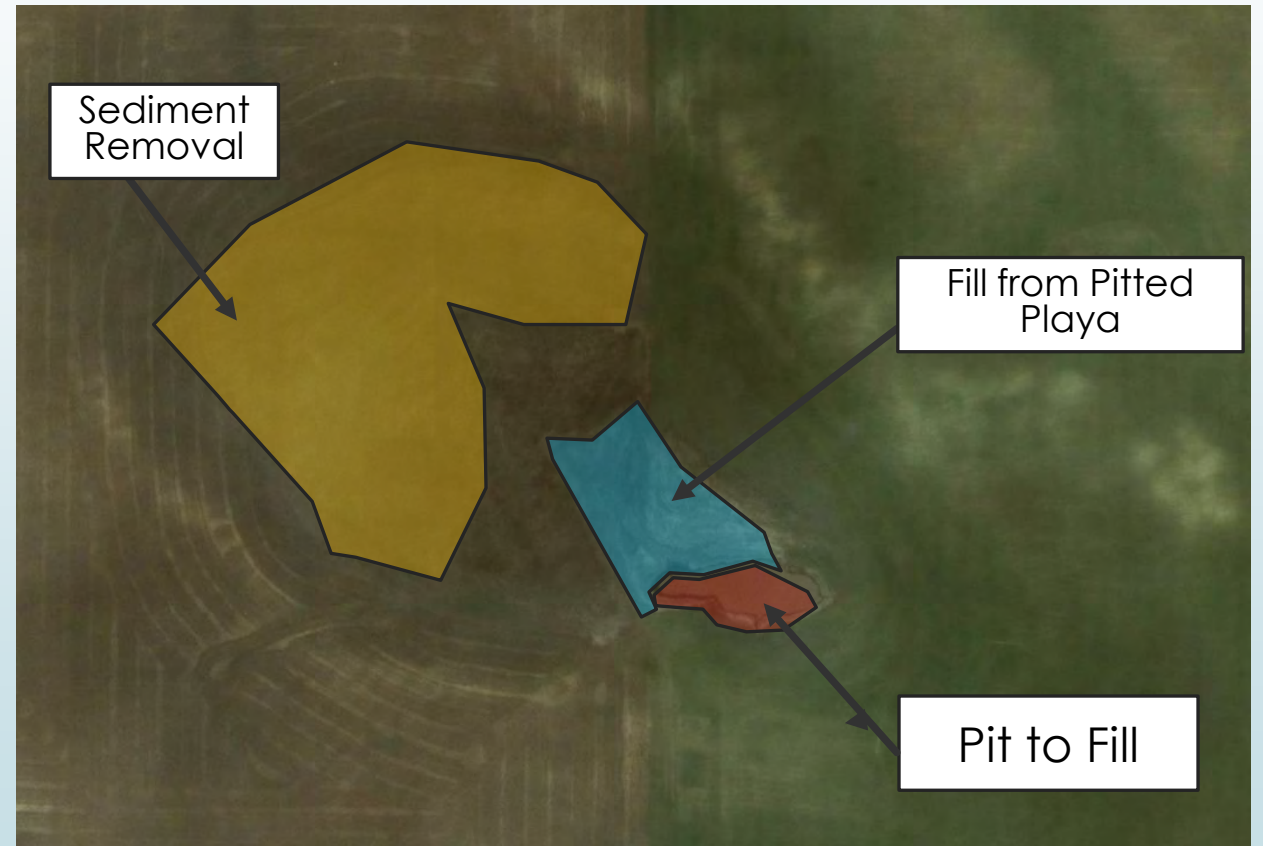
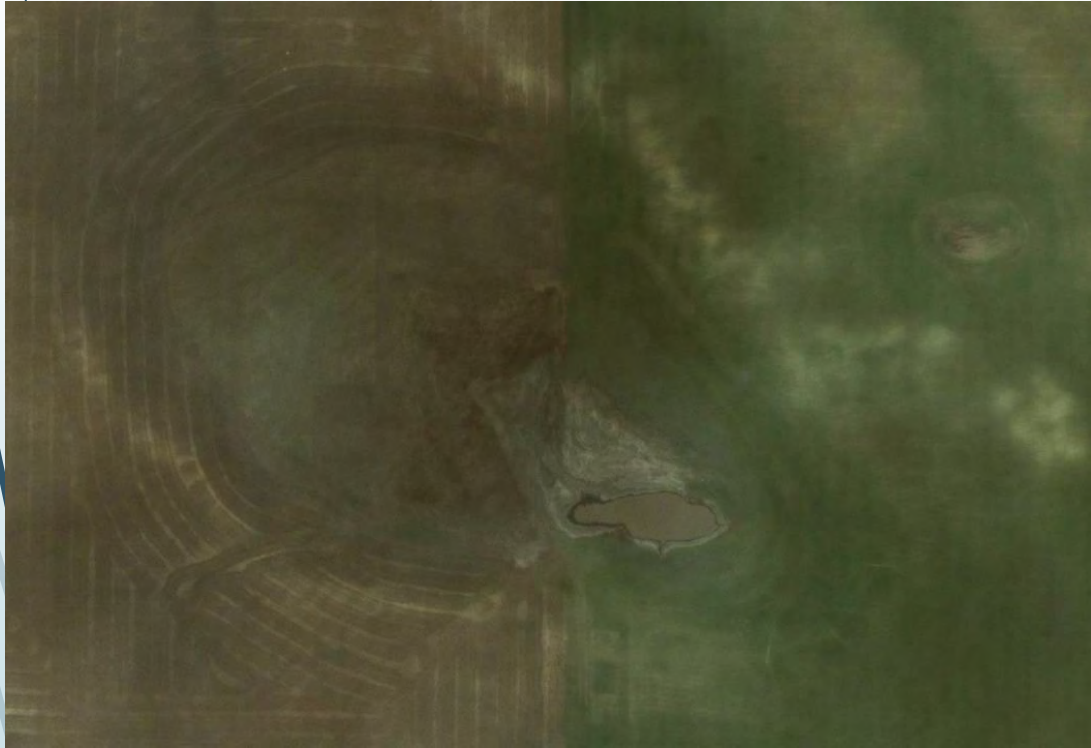
- Dirtwork is the single largest hurdle to most landowners
- USDA assistance
 - 50% cost share through FSA
 - Soil analysis, conservation plan, and engineering through NRCS
- Additional technical and financial assistance available through partners



Migratory Bird SAFE – Dirtwork

- What does dirtwork look like?
 - Pit filling
 - Sediment removal
 - Mindful of distance to Bt layer
 - Miscellaneous
 - Playas bisected by roads
 - Ditched playas (non-road)
- Be mindful of impacts to surrounding wetlands

Migratory Bird SAFE – Example Contract

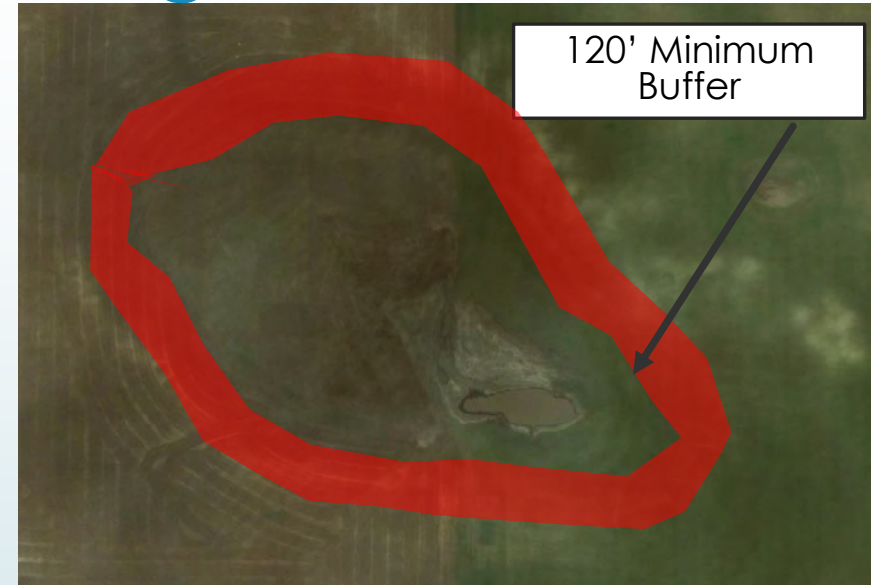
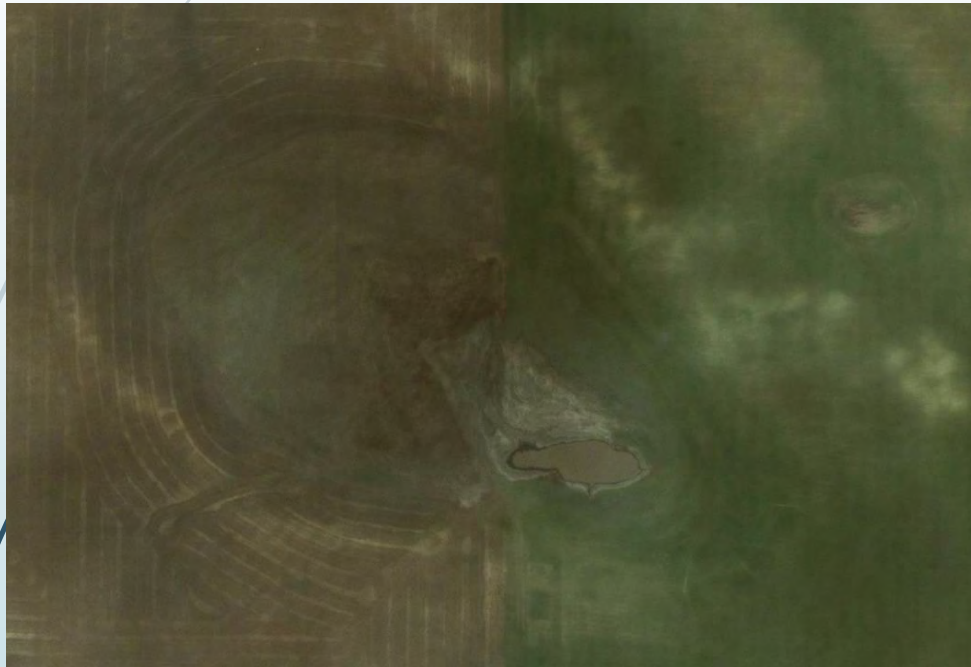




Migratory Bird SAFE – Vegetation Buffers

- Migratory Bird SAFE offers broken up into 2 distinct units
 - Upland Buffer (seeded to native vegetation mix)
 - Playa Wetland (not seeded)
- The landowner and NRCS determine how much buffer is required and desirable
 - The same rental rate is applied to all acres
 - The ratio of upland to wetland acres may not exceed a 4:1 ratio
- Minimum buffer width of 120 ft around the playa

Migratory Bird SAFE – Vegetation Buffers



Migratory Bird SAFE – Vegetation Buffers



- Seed mixes designed to serve multiple purposes
 - “Buffer” sediment flow to the playa and filter water
 - Provide pollinator habitat (especially Monarchs)
 - Nesting and brooding habitat for birds
- Mixed and short grass spp used
 - Use adapted native and non-aggressive spp as much as possible

Migratory Bird SAFE – Buffers and Wetlands



VS.





Migratory Bird SAFE – Contract Management

- Traditional options available
- Prescribed fire and grazing are the “preferred options”
 - Best reflection of historic disturbance
 - But loss of 25% of income significant on these tracts
 - Grazing may not make dollars and sense



Migratory Bird SAFE – Adoption so far...

- Now we know what the program looks like
- How widely adopted has it been so far?
 - 2 batching periods completed
 - Sign up has been limited in Nebraska
 - 1,138 out of 10,000 ac allocated
 - Most attractive to cooperators in western Nebraska
 - Makes sense, rental rates vs annual payments
- We're in the “early adopter” phase

Migratory Bird SAFE – Thanks to the
USDA!



Migratory Bird SAFE – Partner Assistance



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Questions on Migratory Bird SAFE?

