

## The Conservation Reserve Program 20 Years Later- A Success Story!

In 1988 Roger and Ann Ott enrolled 19.2 acres of their property into the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). The Ott's owned a family farm along the Cedar River in Floyd County Iowa. This farm was marginal at best and they felt that the CRP program would be a great way to take some of their ground out of production and plant it to grasses and trees to improve water quality and wildlife habitat. This first CRP contract was planted to cool season grasses and was just the first of many contracts to come.



In 1989 25.5 acres were planted to trees under the CRP CP-3A program. In 1998 18.2 acres of the original 19.2 was reenrolled and planted to native prairie with the remaining acre planted to trees. The Riparian Buffer Program (CP-22) was also utilized in 1999 when 20.3 acres of marginal pasture land was planted to trees. In 2000 the 25.5 acre CP-3A tree planting was reenrolled and finally in 2004, a 7 acre field windbreak was planted.

Both Roger and Ann were very conservation minded and they wanted to do what they could to improve their property for wildlife and water quality. They felt the CRP program was their best opportunity to accomplish these goals and leave a legacy of conservation. In these early planning stages they had no idea that they had only a little time to work on these goals together. During some of the early CRP contracts Roger became very ill and passed away. It was at this point that Ann also came to appreciate some of the other benefits of the CRP program. After Rogers's death, the annual income from the CRP contracts helped Ann keep the farm in the family.



I asked Ann what were some of the things she has noticed since this area was enrolled into CRP. One of the first things she said is “the prairie is wonderful”! The native grass and forb planting is near the house which allows her and her new husband Jon Schneckloth to enjoy the view. She also said



that with the different types of habitat that the CRP program has helped develop, they have seen a big increase in wildlife. Almost daily they can see deer, turkey, otters, eagles, geese, ducks, coyotes and the list goes on. Ann and Jon have been very instrumental in not only supplying the habitat for many types of animals; they have also been involved in introducing native species back to the area. In the early 90’s the Iowa Department of Natural Resources released twelve wild turkeys on the property. In 2004, two trumpeter swans were released and two more will be released in 2005.



Ann says, “One of the best things that the CRP program has done is that it has allowed me to meet a whole network of conservation minded people”. Ann and Jon have used these contacts not only to help improve their property, but to share the information they have learned about conservation with others. Each year the Schneckloth’s host an outdoor classroom program for all of the fifth grade students in Floyd County. This classroom covers topics ranging from forestry and tree planting to fisheries and water quality.

As you can see, from the original 19.2 acre contract in 1988 to today, the CRP program has directly and indirectly accomplished a variety of benefits. It has improved water quality and wildlife habitat, allowed a family to continue to live on and use land that it loves, educated thousands of young minds and most importantly it has fulfilled a dream and left a legacy. I would say the Conservation Reserve Program has been very successful!

Greg Heidebrink  
Assistant District Forester