

Working Lands

This past year has been full of transitions and changes for Audubon Dakota, much like birds going through the molting process, we view this as new colorful plumage to symbolize the growth and change we have embraced this year. From expanding our Audubon Conservation Ranching program, leading a new coalition on prescribed fire, and providing numerous educational and outreach opportunities to our community, we have made the most of 2021 and can't wait to do more.

Our working lands team led by [Joshua Lefers](#) includes [Juli Bosmoe](#), [Cody Grewing](#), and our newly hired Range Ecologist, [Charli Kohler](#). Together they have expanded the [Audubon Conservation Ranching \(ACR\) initiative](#), implemented [prescribed fires](#), and worked with landowners on [Prairie Management Toolbox](#) projects. This spring they successfully signed an agreement with Panorama Meats to expand the reach of our Audubon Conservation Ranching program by enrolling half a million acres nationwide. Our team supported this effort by developing the habit management plans for ranches new to the program.

A coalition led by Audubon Dakota, the North Dakota Prescribed Fire Cooperative, enhanced



The working lands team meets to refresh their plant identification skills in preparation for bird surveys. Photo: Lucy Britton/Audubon Dakota

836 acres of land by completing 10 prescribed burns. The co-op supports landowners with prescribed burns to improve grasslands for cattle and wildlife while demonstrating the value of fire as a grassland management tool. Prescribed fires have been shown to increase diversity, improve habitat structure, reduce invasive grasses and excessive thatch, and improve forage quality. A [field tour](#) hosted this fall included speakers discussing prescribed fire research and science, on-the-ground logistics, and the impact of fire on grassland ecology.

The working lands team completed and continues to work on toolbox projects in North and South Dakota. In North Dakota, four toolboxes were initiated this spring. These projects are impacting grazing management and bird habitat on 692 acres. On another project, in cooperation with North Dakota Game and Fish and Stutsman County Soil Conservation District, the working lands team removed invading Russian olive on 90 acres. The first ever completed South Dakota Prairie Management Toolbox project consisted of controlling Eastern red cedar invasion with prescribed fire on 70 acres. The working lands team continues to support reducing woody species invasion on 3,000 acres within a larger 30,000 acre block of habitat in Mellette County with a project that was started in July and will continue through 2023. Audubon Dakota provided support for grazing infrastructure on 8,000 acres within the same project area to allow producers to improve grazing management for wildlife and grassland health.



Egrets fly across the prairie in North Dakota while cattle graze. Photo: Charli Kohler/Audubon Dakota



Sandhill Crane

Phase two of the [South Dakota Wolsey Crane Important Bird Area \(IBA\)](#) conservation project has been completed, which included identifying and securing a 1,000-acre easement that serves as a roost site for Sandhill and Whooping Cranes during spring migration. Most of the acreage within the Wolsey IBA area is held privately, making it essential for Audubon and conservation organizations to stand up for habitat protection and restoration.

The [CFP](#) is supported by a multi-million-dollar grant that was awarded by the Outdoor Heritage Fund and is backed by eight conservation partners in North Dakota. We are excited to continue this work and review applications for CFP during the upcoming months.

Under the direction of Sarah Hewitt, various stages of integrated prairie management practices were implemented across 807 acres in 34 enrolled urban nature parks as a part of our [Urban Woods and Prairies Initiative](#). Along with the usual weed control and spot spraying, two Moorhead sites received prescribed burns to reduce the presence of invasive vegetation and stimulate regrowth of native plant species. In a new win for the unique partnership between Audubon Dakota and Harvest Hope Farm, the City of Moorhead passed an ordinance allowing a sheep grazing pilot project in Oakport Prairie as a grassland management tool. Read [this article](#) from our Office Manager, [Jodi Meisch](#),

to learn more about the project. As we wrap up the year and plan for next growing season, we continue the process of identifying future expansion sites and funding opportunities with various stakeholders including the Minot Park District, Ducks Unlimited, and University of North Dakota.

Audubon Leadership

Like many offices world-wide, our team remained remote and worked from home the first portion of the year and returned in person in mid-June at a new office in Fargo. During this time, our Audubon Dakota team celebrated [Marshall Johnson](#), Executive Director, as he transitioned into his new role at the national level as Interim Chief Conservation Officer and welcomed [Suzanne Dixon](#), VP of the Mississippi Flyway, as Interim Executive Director. Additionally, thanks to supporting grants, we welcomed [Amanda Booher](#) to the flock in the newly created role of Communications Coordinator.

In October our office began a monthly newsletter, the [Dakota Dabbler](#), to share our story and to provide updates on upcoming volunteer events and our work in conservation. Additionally, through public relations and social media, our communications efforts have amplified the many great projects of Audubon Dakota and helped us engage our community as we tell our story. You can see us on [North Dakota Today](#), [KVRR](#), [KFYRTV](#), and [Prairie Public](#) radio.

Engagement Opportunities

Looking back at 2021 as the world slowly began to emerge from pandemic restrictions, we took care and pride to participate and host events that not only provided educational experiences for our guests, but also kept us safe. Our Senior Coordinator of Engagement, [Meghan Carter-Johnson](#), coordinated 47 engagement opportunities across the state, 11 of which were virtual, reaching over 15,000 attendees. Hosted in conjunction with the Fargo Parks District, we hosted days of birding during at the [Winter Birding](#) and Fargo Birding Festivals where participants saw more than 200 birds.

At the Downtown Fargo Street Fair, we engaged with approximately 10,000 attendees over three days with nature-based activities in an open-air tent.



Bobolink



Birding with a group of students at Buffalo River State Park. Photo: Amanda Booher/Audubon

Every year we participate in [Giving Hearts Day](#) and are so grateful for the generosity of our community. We raised over \$17,000 in 2021 from more than 100 donors. Additionally, we have engaged our community not only at events like the Street Fair, but also through volunteering opportunities. This past year over 100 volunteers donated their time and passion for birds and conservation. Most recently, we participated in CNN's ["Call to Earth"](#) and hosted a volunteer event at Lions Conservancy Park. We had seven members of the community join us as we raked, weeded, and mulched the pollinator garden on a very drizzly November day.

We have had a wonderful and busy year and are looking forward to 2022. At Audubon Dakota we are continually grateful and in awe of the support and many great partnerships our community has to offer. Our work means so much to us and we hope it means a lot to you too.



Staff members posed in the pop-up prairie at the Fargo Street Fair. Photo: Audubon Dakota