



Land Trade: One Approach to Rounding Out Public Lands

Dozens of Rainwater Basin wetlands are partially, but not entirely, owned by a federal or state agency; a portion of the wetland footprint remains on privately owned farm land.

Public land managers (Nebraska Game and Parks Commission or U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service) are generally able to manage a habitat area more effectively if it encompasses all, rather than a portion, of a wetland footprint. If part of the wetland is privately owned and is in row crops, for example, managers of the public land may be limited in their ability to conduct prescribed fire or to control the wetland's water levels.

Agricultural land adjacent to a federal Waterfowl Production Area (WPA) or state-owned Wildlife Management Area (WMA) in the Rainwater Basin sometimes includes several – or many – acres that are flood-prone because they are connected to the larger wetland area. From the public land manager's point of view, these acres are a potential "roundout" to the public wetland. From the agriculture producer's point of view, they are part of his or her operation, though sometimes a troublesome part.

A producer whose land includes a roundout to a public wetland may choose at some point to sell those acres for inclusion in the public land area. In the past, several of these land purchases have been made through the assistance of Ducks Unlimited (DU) and with funding from sources including the Nebraska Environmental Trust, the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA), and DU. Such transactions are always voluntary and on a willing-seller basis.

Instead of a land sale, however, some producers may wish to trade flood-prone acres for an equivalent tract of nearby, non-wetland ground. The RWBJV partnership can sometimes help with this. Certain RWBJV partners may, in the course of purchasing wetland acres or other habitat, come to temporarily own a tract of farmable upland. Because Joint Venture partners support keeping productive agricultural land in production, such a tract may present an opportunity for a land trade with the owner of roundout acres near a WPA or WMA.

Landowners who want to discuss the possibility of a land trade or sale are invited to contact the Rainwater Basin Joint Venture at 308-382-8112.