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Cooperative Extension Service

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This publication is for the purpose of explaining the fish, wildlife, and other recreational aspects of the proposed Wagner Irrigation Unit.

The Wagner Unit, as a part of the South Dakota Pumping Division of the Missouri River Basin Project, has been designed and planned primarily as an irrigation unit to furnish water for approximately 19,500 acres of irrigable land lying in a general area between Lake Andes and Wagner. The proposed project also contains most of the other features of a full-grown multiple purpose project. These include fish and wildlife, recreation, and municipal water, as well as numerous indirect benefits.

Besides Lake Andes itself, three other areas are given consideration. They are Hawley Slough, Choteau Creek, and Red Lake. Map No. 1 shows the entire project and indicates the relative location of these three areas. Maps 2, 3, and 4 show plans for the development of each of the three areas. Map 5 shows a proposed recreational area around the south pool of Lake Andes.

**Recreation Fits**

Rarely do the people of any area have the opportunity to eat their cake and keep it. This, however, the people of the Lake Andes area can enjoy under the proposed Wagner Irrigation Unit. Lake Andes can be used as a storage reservoir for irrigation and also it can be used for recreation by managing the southern unit primarily for fishing and boating and by managing the middle and northern unit primarily for waterfowl.

Some water management projects reduce wildlife habitat. However, the proposed Wagner Unit could improve conditions for wildlife as well as for fisheries and outdoor recreation in general.

**Wildlife**

**Waterfowl.** There is comparatively little waterfowl production habitat in the irrigable lands of the Wagner Unit. At the present time, other than in the marshes of Red Lake, Hawley Slough, Choteau Creek, and Lake Andes, there are only about 500 acres of temporary wetlands and 350 acres of semi-permanent marsh lands in the project area. During the development of the unit for irrigation, 650 of these wetland acres will be eliminated.

Lake Andes is of particular value as a waterfowl producing area and as a waterfowl migration area. Peak waterfowl populations recorded on the lake were 400,000 ducks in November of 1951 and 13,430 geese in January of 1954. An average of about 10 million duck-days and 600,000 goose-days occur annually on the lake.

Lake Andes and some adjacent land now compose the Lake Andes National Wildlife Refuge. Portions of this refuge are normally open for hunting each year. The entire refuge contains 5,450 acres of which approximately 4,900 acres are in the lake. The Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife owns 751 acres of the land and the remaining portion is managed by the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife under easements from the South Dakota Department of Game, Fish, and Parks.

In South Dakota the best waterfowl areas are those which normally are covered by only a few feet of water and which occasionally are completely dry. Therefore from a waterfowl point of view the water levels of Lake Andes have been good but there have been extremes of high and low production of waterfowl. After irrigation it should be a more consistent waterfowl producer. However, the production and harvest of waterfowl in the entire Wagner Unit can be greatly enhanced by the development of Red Lake, Hawley Slough, and Choteau Creek.

Over 1,000 acres are planned for the Red Lake area. Some of these acres already have been acquired by the South Dakota Department of Game, Fish, and Parks.

Around the Hawley Slough area nearly 300 acres are needed for complete development.

By far the largest development for waterfowl will be along Choteau Creek. A total of approximately 2,800 acres would be desirable. About 1,250 acres of open water or marsh could be developed by four low head dams on Choteau Creek. The South Dakota Department of Game, Fish, and Parks feels that certain other areas should be acquired in connection with Choteau Creek and if willing sellers are found these lands will be acquired to round out the development of this area.

The federal refuge branch attempts to produce food for its waterfowl on its own lands. The South Dakota Department of Game, Fish, and Parks feels that it should acquire enough adjacent land to feed the waterfowl that will use the Choteau Creek area. If this is not done, the birds will take all of their food from the adjacent privately owned lands.

Return flow from the adjacent irrigable lands should supply enough water for the Choteau Creek area.

By F. F. Kerr, Extension water resources specialist, and Raymond Lund, district specialist, Water Resources Commission
It is anticipated that the Wagner Unit will supply an additional 1,300 hunter days for waterfowl each year provided the unit is developed as planned.

**Pheasants.** Pheasants are going to be affected in many ways by irrigation. Some of the influencing factors will be beneficial and others detrimental so that the pheasant population may change very little because of irrigation itself. However, the proposed areas for waterfowl will also be beneficial for upland game. It is therefore anticipated that another 1,300 man-days will be spent in the general area in the pursuit of pheasants.

**Other Wildlife.** The Wagner Unit should improve conditions for the furbearers, particularly muskrats, but it should have little affect on the deer population.

**Fisheries**

The Refuge Branch of the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife has agreed to manage the south unit of Lake Andes for fishing and general recreation rather than for waterfowl. In this unit the water level will be raised to an elevation that will, under normal and ordinary conditions, carry the fish population through the winter. The design of the proposed inlet-outlet structure is such that the entire lake could be drained if it should become desirable to start a new population of fish.

The middle unit will be managed primarily for waterfowl. Occasionally, however, it may develop into a desirable fishery. The north unit will have a more consistent fishery since return flows from the adjacent irrigated lands will tend to keep the water levels at near maximum.

It is expected that with the construction of the Wagner Unit an additional 35,000 fisherman-days will be spent annually on the lake.

**Other Recreation**

Boating and water skiing undoubtedly will be popular on Lake Andes. Two recreational areas which may include boat launching facilities, picnic grounds, camping sites, swimming beaches, and seasonal cabin use are being contemplated on the shores of the south unit. Undoubtedly zoning will be necessary in order to reduce friction between various users.

Each fall the water lost through evaporation and not replaced by inflows could be replaced by pumping from the Fort Randall Reservoir.

With recreational development as a part of the multiple purpose Wagner Irrigation Unit the sum total of benefits is impressive. It is understood that arrangements will be made in which each of the benefited multiple purpose interests in the Wagner Unit will share in operation and maintenance expenses.

Other publications dealing directly with the individual multiple uses are available at the County Extension Offices.
Map 1. Entire Project showing the relative locations of Hawley Slough, Choteau Creek, and Red Lake.
Map 3. Plans for Development of Choteau Creek.

Map 5. Proposed Recreational Area Around the South Pool of Lake Andes.

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