

# Setting Targets for Wildlife Habitat within the Lower Souris Watershed



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## 1.0 Target Setting Process

Watershed representatives were gathered to establish locally developed wildlife habitat targets within the Lower Souris Watershed as part of the Lower Souris Ecological Goods and Services project. Representatives were members of the three sub-watershed groups across the entire watershed. The members of the sub-watershed groups were local urban and rural municipal leaders, wildlife federation members, local agricultural producers, and interested citizens of the watershed. As such there was a diverse mix of interests and backgrounds brought to the table. These members were encouraged during the course of this project towards an open exchange of ideas, thoughts, and viewpoints.

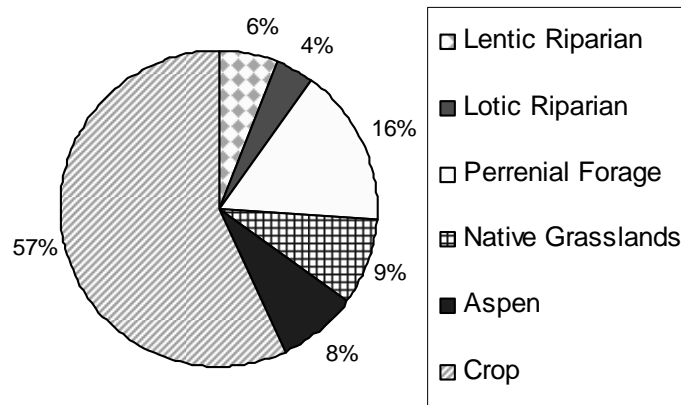
At a meeting held on April 4, 2008 initial wildlife habitat targets for the watershed were established. Members were presented the wildlife abundance models developed by White (2007). By infusing local knowledge, personal values and interests with the information produced by the report produced by White (2007), members developed the initial wildlife habitat targets for the watershed area. During this exercise the watershed representatives were encouraged to take into consideration all of the information that was available to them.

Over the course of this exercise numerous goals and values were brought forward for consideration by the group members. The group emphasised that the landscape needs viable industries that generate economic outputs in conjunction with providing sustainable wildlife habitat. An appropriate balance of industry and environment is needed to sustain quality of life and natural resources. Along with these points the group wanted to ensure that EG&S programs would encourage the maintenance of natural resources while improving land management practices and promoting economic activity within the region. Several more important points grew out of group discussion:

- Group members also discussed that there is a known relationship between the diversity of wildlife habitats for the various breeding populations of local wildlife species.
- Local priority wildlife species need to be managed for to ensure their existence.
- A need for increased public education and awareness about wildlife and habitat functions exists
- Landowners currently are the stewards of the landscape and deserve recognition for their efforts towards protecting what habitat that currently exists. Non-landowners need to respect the rights of landowners when making decisions about future wildlife habitat targets.

Considering this information the watershed representative's were asked to develop locally set targets towards what portions of the watershed they wanted to be in the following habitat classes: Lentic Riparian, Lotic Riparian, Perennial Forage, Native Grasslands, Aspen and Crop (Figure 1).

### Wildlife Habitat Targets



**Figure 1** – Landscape type targets towards the provision of wildlife habitat within the Lower Souris Watershed.

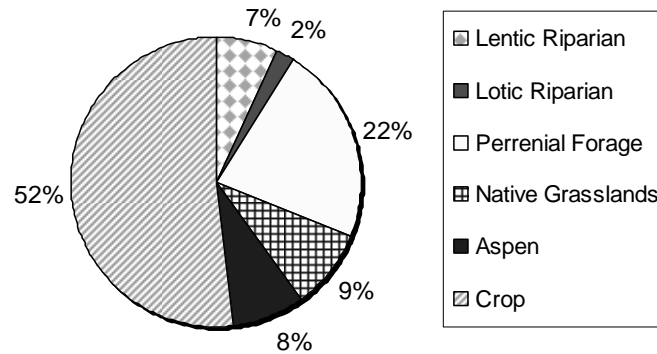
The watershed representatives were introduced to the concept of range, riparian and forest health assessments as discussed in Soulodre (2008) then asked to develop targets for the state of habitat quality within the watershed for the following land classes: Lentic Riparian, Lotic Riparian, Perennial Forage, Native Grasslands, and Aspen (Table 1).

	HEALTHY	HEALTHY WITH PROBLEMS	UNHEALTHY
PERRENIAL FORAGE	30%	63%	7%
NATIVE GRASSLANDS	36%	57%	7%
ASPEN	42%	53%	5%
LOTIC RIPARIAN	75%	22%	3%
LENTIC RIPARIAN	67%	23%	10%

**Table 1** – Wildlife Habitat Quality Targets for the Lower Souris Watershed

Following the detailed inventory that was performed by Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC), (Boychuk 2009) and the habitat quality assessments that were performed by the Lower Souris Watershed (Soulodre 2008) the watershed representatives were collectively gathered on February 25, 2009 to discuss the results of the biophysical inventory and wildlife habitat quality survey . Upon review of this information the watershed representatives were asked if they wanted to adjust any of the initial wildlife targets that they had established. The group reach consensus that the wildlife habitat quantity and quality targets that they previously determined were achievable, responsible and realistic.

## BioPhysical Inventory



**Figure 2** – Landscape types as determined by DUCS detailed inventory of the Lower Souris Watershed.

	HEALTHY	HEALTHY WITH PROBLEMS	UNHEALTHY
PERRENIAL FORAGE	46%	49%	5%
NATIVE GRASSLANDS	2%	18%	80%
ASPEN	5%	29%	66%
LOTIC RIPARIAN	28%	62%	10%
LENTIC RIPARIAN	41%	41%	18%

**Table 2** – Results of detailed Wildlife Habitat Quality Survey for the Lower Souris Watershed

It is noteworthy that the watershed representatives were astonished with how closely the bio-physical inventory conducted by DUC mirrored the landscape targets that they had established. They noted that there is a portion of agricultural lands that will adapt between perennial forage and annual crop in response to fluctuating agricultural markets. Producers recognized that the results of the wildlife habitat quality survey do not align well with the quality targets that were established. They have not chosen to alter these targets in response due to the belief that the quality targets established are achievable, realistic and will have a benefit to the long term sustainability of their agricultural enterprises.