

Conserving Habitat in the Working Landscape

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Peoples Company’s land management approach can be drilled down to one sentence: “Maximize yield on the most productive acres while protecting the environmentally sensitive acres.”

Working with top producers driven by data, we diligently work to stretch for yields where the investment in seed, fertilizer, and chemical inputs will provide a return. Experience has also taught us that almost every farm has non-productive acres where the same investment does not yield a return.

When inputs are not efficiently transferred to a cash crop, we often find lighter soils, increased slope, or other variability. Surface water leaving the farm can carry soil past the field border, along with chemicals and fertilizers polluting the watershed. Standing water can also have a negative effect on water quality in the larger landscape.

Pulling non-productive acres from the tillable acres may have multiple benefits for the producer and landowner:

- - Return on input investment is increased when placed only on top-producing acres.
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- - Removing poorly producing acres increases the overall field yield average over time, which can result in more favorable rental terms.
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- - Adding perennial vegetation in targeted areas can significantly affect water flow and erosion over the full farm. Pulling a few marginal acres out of production may keep valuable (and hard-to-replace) topsoil across additional acres.

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- - USDA's Conservation Reserve Program can be used to establish perennial vegetation and serve as an alternative income source.
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- - The opportunity for landowner connection and interaction with the land may increase with additional recreational and aesthetic value.

Pulling non-productive acres from a tillable farm also has multiple benefits for the diverse population of insects and animals who share natural resources. Conservation of biodiversity in the working landscape is a key component of our collective sustainable future.

Peoples Company is committed to all managed acres enrolled in the Leading Harvest Sustainability Standard and was the first private farm management firm in the nation to be certified in 2021. The standard consists of 13 principles that address farmland stewardship and a commitment to those connected to the land that sustains our natural resources and rural communities.

A commitment to biodiversity is included in the standard's seventh principle: "To manage farmland in a manner that maintains agricultural production while conserving biological diversity—including animal and plant species, wildlife habitats and natural or ecological community types—and avoids habitat conversion."

What does practicing this principle look like on Peoples Company managed land?

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- - When evaluating new farmland, we use tools like U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's Information for Planning and Consultation (IPaC) to assess threatened and endangered species. IPaC's online tool assists in identifying species, critical habitats, and migratory birds that may be impacted by farming decisions on a managed farm.
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- - If endangered and threatened species are listed for a farm's region, we seek local expertise to understand best practices to ensure our management plan considers listed species.
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- - Peoples Company Land Managers may not always have the authority to make pest and management decisions on a farm. What we can do is offer tenant guidance in chemical management for weeds, insects, and disease management. We encourage an integrated management approach that includes identifying pest thresholds with crop scouting schedules to treat problems as they arise versus proactive, more blanket applications.
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- - Mowing and burning are often used as management practices for invasive species and general establishment of a native planting. We follow regional nesting season calendars when determining maintenance schedules.
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- - We propose investments in habitat when possible. This may include tree wind rows, filter strips, and prairie plantings. It could also include adding native species and pollinators to already planned plantings like field borders, waterways, and roadway ditches.
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- - We can reduce inputs leaving a farm and affecting habitat in the watershed by incorporating green cover between cash crops, and filtering drainage tile before it leaves the farm. Variable rate fertilizer applications ensure the product is placed where needed versus broadcast spread.
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- - If the farm falls in an ecologically important area, we seek out local expertise to find ways to connect with the local community. If work is being done on the larger landscape, we seek out opportunities to be part of the solution.

Landowners interested in learning more about incorporating habitat into their farm planning are encouraged to contact Peoples Company Land Management at LandManagement@PeoplesCompany.com.