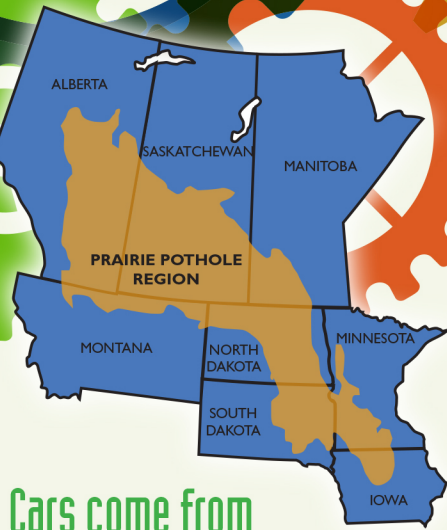


# The Duck Factory

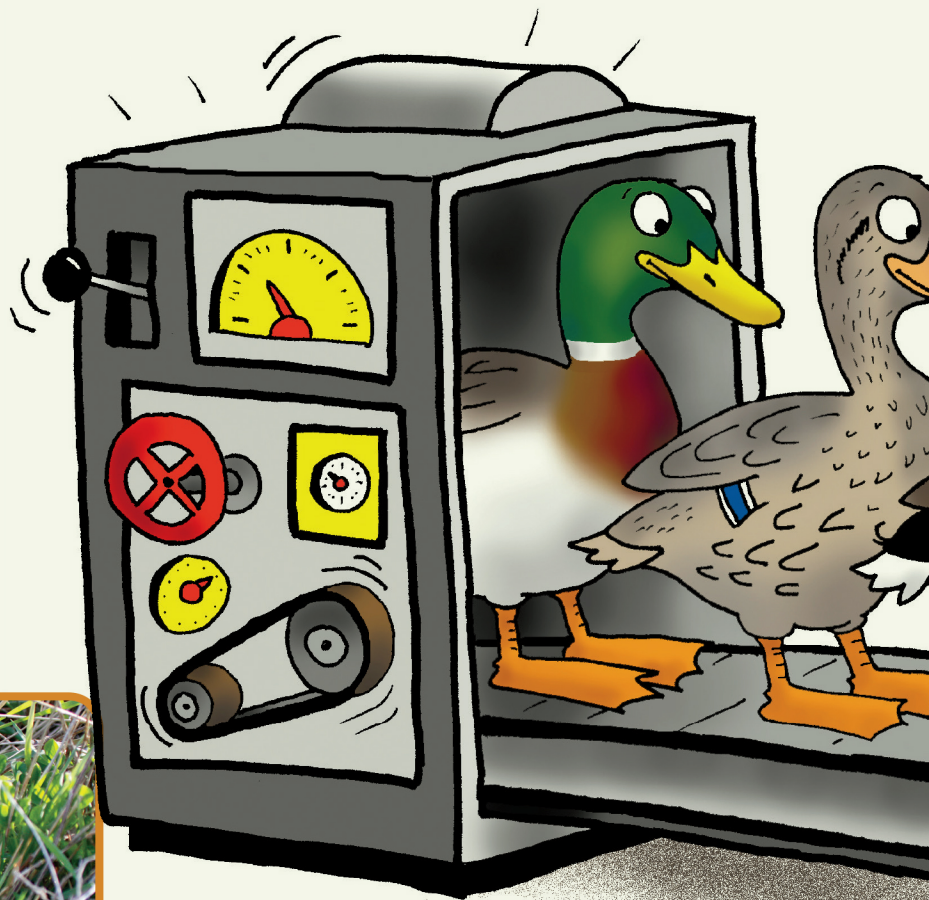
Many of North America's ducks are raised in the Prairie Pothole Region



Cars come from a factory. Even toasters and televisions do.

## But ducks?

Well, not really. But one particular area of North America raises so many waterfowl that it is called the Duck Factory. This area is the Prairie Pothole Region of the United States and Canada. Read on to learn more about the Duck Factory and why it is so important to waterfowl and other wildlife.



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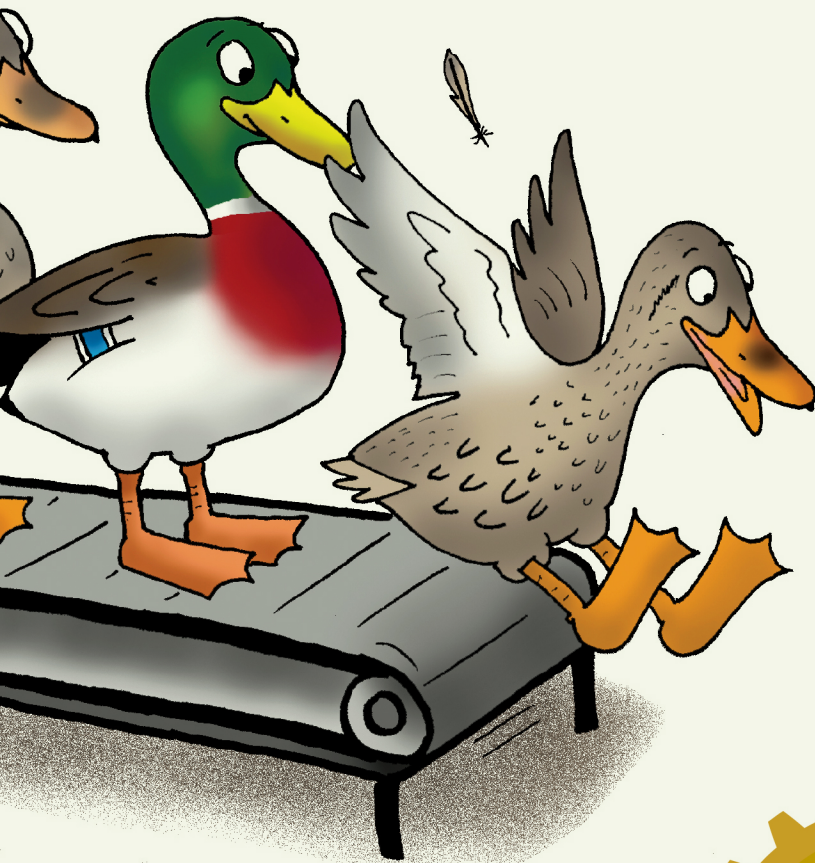
## A Sea of Grass and Wetlands

The Duck Factory is really big. It stretches from Iowa and Minnesota across South Dakota, North Dakota, and Montana into the Canadian provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta. This region was once a vast sea of grass dotted with millions of ponds called "potholes." These small wetlands were formed about 10,000 years ago when huge sheets of ice covering the land melted. All that water flowed into low spots, creating wetland habitat for waterfowl and other wildlife. Grasses grew on the surrounding landscape, providing nesting cover for ducks and other birds.

Why didn't trees grow on the prairie? Well, some did, mainly along rivers. But the grasslands were kept open by big prairie fires, and by millions of grazing bison, elk, antelope, and deer. The weather in the Duck Factory is also often very dry, and grasses can grow in drier places than trees can.



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# Boom and Bust



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During drought years, many prairie potholes go dry, and the Duck Factory doesn't raise that many birds. But during wet years, when most of the potholes are brimming with water, the Duck Factory really goes into high gear. At these times, the Prairie Pothole Region supports more than half of North America's breeding waterfowl.

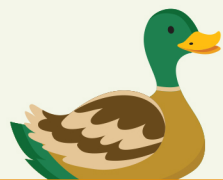
The Duck Factory is an important breeding ground for several species of waterfowl, including mallards, northern pintails, blue-winged teal, gadwalls, canvasbacks, redheads, and Canada geese. Many more species of ducks and geese rely on prairie wetlands during migration. The Duck Factory also supports many other species of prairie-nesting birds, including hawks, owls, shorebirds, wading birds, ring-necked pheasants, sharp-tailed grouse, and prairie chickens.

## Home on the Prairie

People have lived in the Duck Factory for a long time. Native Americans and Canadians have hunted wild game and grown crops here for centuries. More than 200 years ago, President Thomas Jefferson sent an expedition led by Meriwether Lewis and William Clark to explore the land west of the Mississippi River. As they crossed the open prairie, they were amazed by all the animals they saw, including great herds of bison and huge flocks of ducks, geese, swans, and other birds.

Not long after Lewis and Clark's expedition, farmers arrived from the east and began to permanently settle on the prairie. These "homesteaders" plowed the grassland and planted crops such as wheat and corn in the rich prairie soil. Others brought cattle and established big ranches covering thousands of acres. Life was hard for the settlers, but many of them succeeded in making a new life on the prairie. They built homes, schools, churches, and businesses and established towns, which attracted even more settlers to the region.

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# Trouble for Ducks

But more people meant less habitat for ducks and other wildlife. Each year more grassland was turned into cropland. People also started to drain and fill in the potholes. Soon they had drained almost all the potholes in Iowa and Minnesota! Things were not much better in the Dakotas and Canada.

During the 1930s a big drought hit the prairies, and most of the remaining potholes went dry. In plowed fields, topsoil blew away in the wind, creating huge dust storms. Many prairie farmers lost everything in what came to be known as the Dust Bowl. Duck populations also crashed. During this difficult time, it looked like the Duck Factory would go out of business.

## Saving the Duck Factory



If ducks didn't have friends, this could have been the end of a very sad story. But they do have friends, like you. Duck hunters saw what was happening, and they were worried. In 1937, they founded

Ducks Unlimited to help the ducks. And like the ducks, DU has friends. Lots of them. Like the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the wildlife departments in states and provinces. They are partners with the same goal—to help save what is left of the Duck Factory, repair parts that are broken, and keep it in business.

DU and its partners work with farmers and ranchers who want to save grassland and potholes. Using money from DU members, sales of state and federal duck stamps, and other sources, they pay landowners to protect important duck habitat. They also buy prairie land, which is protected forever for wildlife and is also open to the public for hunting, wildlife viewing, and other outdoor activities. Even though the Duck Factory will never produce as many ducks as it once did, we can make sure it always stays in business. And as a Greenwing, you are a part of making that happen!

DUCKS UNLIMITED



RON SPOMER, DU

