Kelly's Slough National Wildlife Refuge (NWR)

Located in the Blooming Township of Grand Forks County, the refuge is within the ancient glacial Lake Agassiz region. The unique lanqscape was shaped by the action of glaciers and waves. A little over 100 years ago the Kelly family settled the land including the slough. Members of the Kelly family understood the value of native prairie and did not farm the slough. They asked the federal government to protect the 1,270 acres of native tallgrass prairie. In 1936, President Roosevelt established Kellys Slough NWR. It is surrounded by 2,500 acres of Waterfowl Production Areas, which were purchased with Federal Duck Stamp funds. The North American Waterfowl Management Plan was developed for Kellys Slough in 1990.

In 1991 Ducks Unlimited provided funding to construct several water control structures and dikes so that 8 pools of water covering 936 acres could be regulated. Water levels are regulated to provide a variety of depths within the wetlands. The water is raised and lowered seasonally to provide habitat for waterfowl, wading birds and shorebirds. The upland grassland areas are managed through prescribed burning, farming and haying. The NWR has three short nature trails and two elevated viewing towers; one equipped with a 20-power telescope.

On July 25, 2003 we held a dedication ceremony ay Kelly's Slough recognizing its' international importance as a wetlands/grassland preserve. The American Bird Conservancy has designated the Slough as a Globally Important Bird Area. Waterfowl and songbirds depend on the slough both for habitat and for migration. Twelve species of ducks nest on the refuge. Mallards and gadwall comprise half of the ducks in a typical nesting season. Blue-winged teal, green-winged teal, American wigeon, northern shovelers, northern pintails, lesser scaup, redheads, canvasbacks, hooded mergansers, and wood ducks also nest on the refuge.

The Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network designated the Refuge as a Regional Site in 2003. More than 35,000 shorebirds visit the refuge from April to August. Semi-palmated sandpipers are the most abundant species. Lesser yellowlegs, Wilson's phalaropes, American avocets, stilt sandpipers, pectoral sandpipers, dowitchers, and dunlins also use the refuge en route to their breeding grounds in Canada. Up to 22 species of shore birds can be found using the refuge for their fall migration July-September. Shorebirds that nest at the refuge include American avocets, killdeer, Wilson's phalaropes, willets, marbled godwits, upland sandpipers and spotted sandpipers. Some of the migratory and resident songbirds include claycolored and Nelson's sharp-tailed sparrows, eastern kingbirds, western kingbirds, bobolinks, cliff swallows, bam swallows, bank swallows, tree swallows, western meadowlarks, sedge wrens, marsh wrens, Baltimore orioles, orchard orioles, least flycatchers, and willow flycatchers. LeConte's, grasshopper, and Savannah sparrows are highly dependent on grassland and spend summers on the refuge. Raptors include red-tailed hawks, northern harriers, bald eagles, peregrine falcons, and prairie falcons. Wading birds include great blue herons, black-crowned night herons, great egrets, and American bitterns. Spring migration brings flocks of tundra swans, snow geese, and sandhill cranes. Hungarian partridge, sharp-tailed grouse, and greater prairie chickens make the refuge their year-round home. Mammals include white-tailed deer, muskrats, raccoons, white-tailed jackrabbits, and mink.

The slough is protected by the United States Department of Natural Resources. It is based on an alkaline flat. Traces of salt left on the shoreline support unique plants. The grasslands are preserved native tallgrass prairie. The refuge is monitored for two invasive species Purple Loosestrife and Leafy Spurge.