



flyway

Partners renew funding of the Oak Hammock Marsh Interpretive Centre

Ducks Unlimited Canada and the Province of Manitoba formally renewed their funding agreement for the Oak Hammock Marsh Interpretive Centre at a ceremony held on Oct. 2, 2003. The Honourable Steve Ashton, minister of conservation, and Gord Edwards, DUC's executive vice-president, signed the agreement that will see each partner give \$1 million to the Interpretive Centre over the next five years.

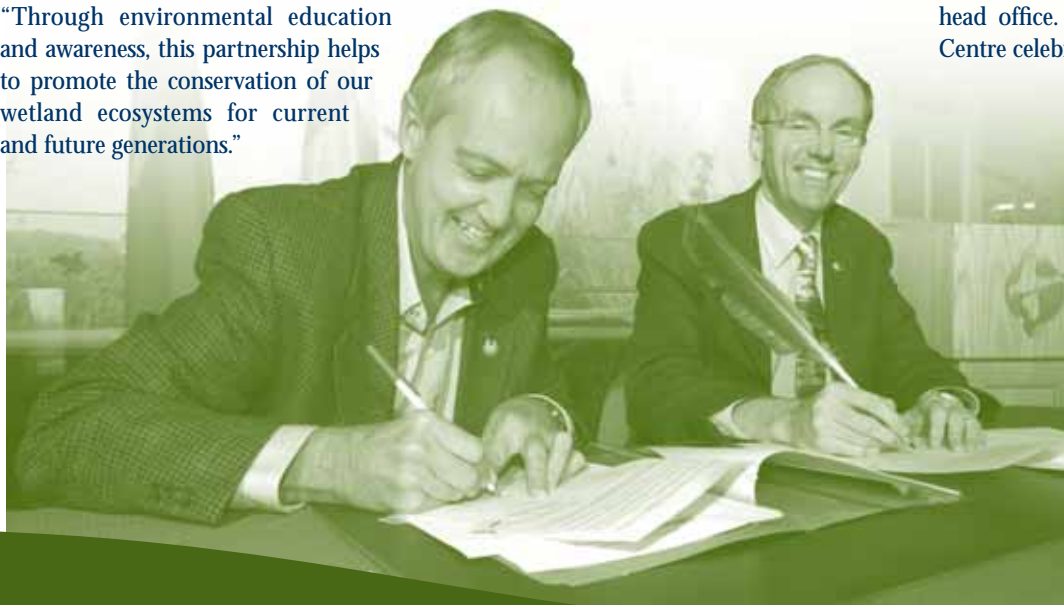
"The Oak Hammock Marsh Interpretive Centre is a world-class environmental education facility that promotes the protection of our wetlands," said Minister Ashton. "Through environmental education and awareness, this partnership helps to promote the conservation of our wetland ecosystems for current and future generations."

Gord Edwards also acknowledged the value of working with the Province for wetland education in Manitoba. "Partnerships such as this are very important for DUC," said Edwards. "We work very hard to garner support for wetland conservation by educating Canadians about the many values and benefits of wetland habitats, and the Interpretive Centre is a critical part of DUC's education efforts."

Bob Laidler, general manager of the Interpretive Centre, said that a good portion of the funding will be used to upgrade existing exhibits and facilities.

"The Interpretive Centre is really a three-phase project," Laidler said. "The first phase was to get the centre up and running. Phase two involved positioning the centre as a successful education and tourism facility. With the renewal of the agreement, we can now focus on phase three – improving the exhibits, facilities and services we offer so that the Oak Hammock Marsh Interpretive Centre remains one of the world's best in environmental education and tourism."

The Interpretive Centre is housed within the Oak Hammock Marsh Conservation Centre, which is also home to DUC's national head office. This year, the Conservation Centre celebrated its 10th anniversary.



DUC executive vice-president Gord Edwards (l) and then Conservation Minister and now current Water Stewardship Minister Steve Ashton (r) pen their names on the agreement that will see each partner give \$1 million to the Oak Hammock Marsh Interpretive Centre over the next five years.

It's a bird, it's a plane, it's...NAWMP!

Have you ever driven by a slough or a marsh and wondered why it's there and why it hasn't been drained? Have you ever wondered what kind or how much wildlife there is in the settled parts of the Prairies? Have you ever thought about how much money is invested in conserving waterfowl in your province? Look no further than the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP) for the answers.

A host of government agencies, not-for-profit organizations, corporations, landowners and volunteers have all been working very hard for 17 years to implement the most wide-ranging land use and wildlife habitat program in the world. All this work has been done under the umbrella of NAWMP.

Implemented in 1986, NAWMP is a conservation partnership between Canada, the U.S. and Mexico. The goal is to restore continental waterfowl populations to what they were on average in the 1970s, before a severe decline began.

In Alberta, for example, the NAWMP is directed and delivered by a like-minded group of government and non-government agencies under the Alberta NAWMP Partnership (ANP). DUC is a primary delivery agency of NAWMP habitat programs on behalf of the ANP. DUC land use conservation programs that make it possible for wildlife to exist in harmony with agriculture, are delivered by a team of more than 70 biologists, agrologists, technicians, engineers and administrative support staff.

In Alberta, where breeding habitat for more than 20 per cent of the continent's waterfowl is found, \$197,000,000 has been invested in the province, 4,550 habitat projects have been undertaken, and more than 1.5 million acres of wildlife habitat have been secured since NAWMP was implemented.

DUC's habitat enhancement projects benefit waterfowl and a wide diversity of amphibians, reptiles, fish, mammals and plants. People benefit from DUC's NAWMP activities, too.

Healthy rural landscapes result from increased waterfowl nesting cover and conserved wetlands. Water quality and supply are improved. Water is filtered through wetlands, which also help control flooding and provide water for livestock and irrigation. Habitat projects provide increased tourism, hiking, bird-watching, hunting, skiing and photography opportunities. Wetlands also serve as outdoor classrooms for people of all ages.

DUC also promotes sustainable land use through a strategic government liaison program. Through this program, government acts, programs and policies are reviewed in order to maximize wildlife habitat benefits. As a result, DUC and its NAWMP partners can indirectly provide even more wide-ranging benefits to waterfowl, wildlife and people.



Down on the Birdwalk

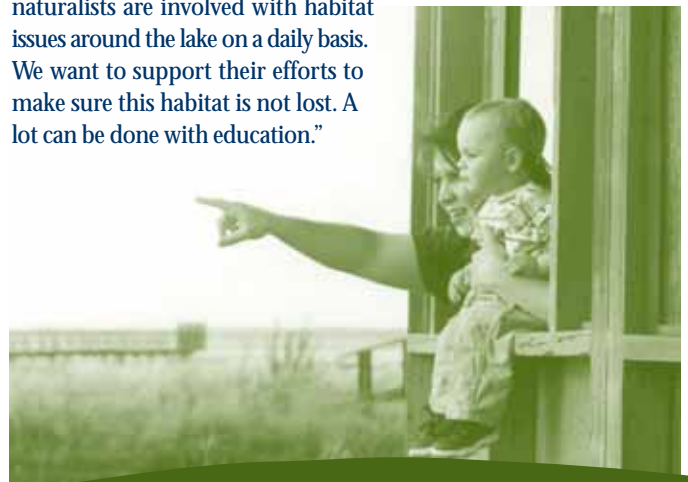
A year-old stewardship program at work in northern Alberta shows how creative partnerships and targeted grants help DUC work with other organizations to make sure important messages about habitat conservation get out to where they do the most good.

In September 2002, DUC agreed to give Kimiwan Lake Naturalists (KLN) \$20,000 over five years. In return, the not-for-profit society presents an annual proposal about how it will use the money to promote wetland and riparian stewardship at Kimiwan Lake. The lake is an important breeding and staging habitat for migrating waterfowl, says Ken Lumbis, manager of field operations with DUC's office in Grande Prairie.

Located at the town of McLennan, southeast of Peace River, Kimiwan Lake covers a whopping 10,000 acres. Designated a Globally Significant Important Bird Area and a Migratory Bird Sanctuary, it is the most northerly site in Alberta to be nominated under the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network. A shallow water body used by an estimated 220 species of birds, including trumpeter swans and a host of other waterfowl, shorebirds and songbirds, the lake was under considerable pressure for drainage when the Save the Lake Committee formed in the early 1970s. That was the precursor to KLN, which now operates the Kimiwan Lake Interpretive Centre at the lake, says Louise Faulkner, a KLN director and co-ordinator of the Kimiwan Lake Interpretive Centre. The centre is open from May to September.

Faulkner says the grant extends a decades-old relationship with DUC and gives the naturalists some welcome stability. Last year, the society used part of the money to establish a Web site, www.kimiwanbirdwalk.com. The site includes the results of swan staging surveys and avian inventories. It also profiles the interpretive centre and a birdwalk that was built in 1992. Since the birdwalk's construction, the centre has recorded more than 30,000 visitors.

The DUC funds support research by covering some of the costs the volunteer naturalists incur to help other conservation organizations collect data regarding wildlife populations, explains Lumbis. "The naturalists are involved with habitat issues around the lake on a daily basis. We want to support their efforts to make sure this habitat is not lost. A lot can be done with education."



Pam Heckbert points out bird activities to her son Bradyn from the observation tower at the Kimiwan Birdwalk.

Project dedication honours past president

Ducks Unlimited Canada hosted a habitat project dedication ceremony Sept. 13 near Minnedosa, Man., to honour former DUC president Hon. W. Jack McKeag.

A cairn was unveiled for approximately 35 guests, and speakers included current and former DUC employees and directors such as director Ross Gage, manager of education programs Rick Wishart and former executive vice-president D. Stewart Morrison.

The habitat project, which DUC purchased from the Bob McNabb family, is northwest of Minnedosa in the Rural Municipality of Minto. Now formally called the Honourable W. Jack McKeag Project, the quarter-section parcel comprises 106 acres of upland habitat and 54 acres of wetlands.

McKeag, DUC president from 1984 to 1985, is now an honorary director of the organization. First elected to the DUC board in 1976, he became treasurer in 1979. From 1980 to 1983, McKeag was DUC's vice-president. After his retirement in 1992, McKeag became an honorary director of DUC, a lifetime appointment accorded to retiring presidents.

"A key accomplishment of Jack's was his leadership regarding DUC's participation in the North American Waterfowl Management Plan," says manager of field operations Bob Grant, who acted as master of ceremonies at the dedication ceremony.

DUC purchased the McKeag habitat project in 1991 in partnership with the North American Waterfowl Management Plan and the Bob McNabb family. The project is composed of a larger permanent wetland and several semi-permanent potholes, native uplands and cultivated land that DUC

converted to permanent native grass cover.

The many wetlands on the property were restored to full productivity through the construction of small earthen dams or "plugs". Soon after their acquisition by DUC, the cultivated uplands on the property were sown to a native grass mixture of northern wheat grass, western wheat grass, green needle grass and slender wheat grass that now serves as dense nesting cover for waterfowl, complementing the existing native grass and shrubland.



DUC past president Hon. W. Jack McKeag (r) poses next to his project dedication plaque with landowner Bob McNabb.

Flying with the birds, for the birds

On a good day, their wheels are off the ground just after 6 a.m. and for the better part of the next five hours, they're in the air, flying with the birds, for the birds. "They" are the 12 pilot biologists of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), a skilled group of individuals whose professional lives in wildlife management include regular stints in Canada. Here, they pilot single-engine aircraft and contribute to international efforts to tally the North American waterfowl population.

Jim Voelzer of Oregon is the USFWS chief of waterfowl population surveys. Twice a year, he dispatches a few U.S. pilot biologists to Canada to fly routes in the Prairie provinces, B.C. and parts of Ontario, Quebec and the Maritimes. Each plane typically carries a pilot

biologist and an observer, both of whom collect data that is then shared with waterfowl conservationists in Canada and the U.S.

"If there's going to be a hunting season, we've got to have population surveys," notes Voelzer, himself a pilot biologist.

The aerial surveys in Alberta coincide with breeding (May) and production (July), says Don Watson, head of conservation programs for DUC's Prairie field office. As part of its commitment to the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, DUC helps the Canadian ground crews comprised of Canadian Wildlife Service and, in Alberta, Alberta Fish and Wildlife personnel. Using transects established in the 1950s, ground crews cover the same landscape as their flying counterparts.

Co-operation between the two countries dates back to the Migratory Bird Act of 1918. While governments use the data to set hunting regulations, organizations like DUC use it to support ground-level habitat conservation, says Watson.

Pilot biologist Ray Bentley, who flew his first Alberta survey route this spring, sees the survey data in action when he heads north from his home in Oregon to band waterfowl in the Brooks area each August. Like Voelzer, Bentley says he appreciates the help of DUC staff as ground crew support for the aerial surveys and in the banding program. In the Brooks area, much of the latter occurs on DUC-managed wetlands.

Winter wheat a hot topic at Kelburn Farm's Agronomy Days

In July each year, Pioneer Grain organizes Agronomy Days, a three-day training tour at Kelburn Farm, a 500-acre research and demonstration site south of Winnipeg. The tour is a part of the intensive ongoing training Pioneer provides to its staff to ensure its agrologists are up-to-date on current trends and innovations in farm crops and practices.

As a division of James Richardson International (JRI), Pioneer, brings in guest speakers from throughout the agriculture industry. This year, agrologists from DUC were invited to conduct a presentation on winter wheat, given DUC's experience in supporting winter wheat crop and market development.

Paul Thoroughgood, DUC's regional agrologist for the Prairies, was one of three DUC speakers who presented information on winter wheat history, varieties, seeding, and crop maintenance details to 40 Pioneer agronomists over one day of the tour.

Thoroughgood notes that one of DUC's goals is to encourage crops that provide undisturbed nesting cover for waterfowl. These crops also reduce soil erosion and make efficient use of spring moisture.

"We are also seeking a closer working relationship with agriculture companies like JRI and its subsidiary Pioneer," says Thoroughgood, who notes that top-notch demonstration opportunities like Kelburn are essential to getting quality information out to producers. "It's a real asset for us to have a relationship with JRI. Working in co-operation with a company with such a large presence on the Prairie landscape is a significant step in reaching more farmers – with an alternate way to grow grain, make a profit, and also provide conservation and habitat benefits that help fulfill some important DUC goals."

Kelburn operates 600 small plots for specific demonstrations, as well as several larger plots where up to 30 varieties of canola,

wheat and other grains may be planted. The crops are then farmed to determine how they respond to all types of conditions. These crops become the major focus on the annual tour, with participants able to ask questions while seeing the crops up close.

Will Kelburn Farm continue providing winter wheat as a part of its training package? "Absolutely," says Kelburn Farm manager Brian Hellegards. "People on the tour were very happy with the quality of information DUC gave, and with the potential of the crop. We already have eight varieties ready to go for this year, and would like to have DUC back to be a part of our Agronomy Days next year."

Winter wheat – a crop that can improve the bottom line for producers – also provides important soil and water conservation benefits, wildlife habitat opportunities, and makes scientists and industry excited. Expect to see more of it on the Prairies.

Woodlands Sporting Clay Shoot keeps recreational tradition alive

The 16th edition of Manitoba's Woodlands Sporting Clay Shoot raised more than \$7,000 for DUC this past August, furthering its legacy as one of DUC's consistent fundraising channels. The event was launched in 1988 in St. Ambrose, Man., by the late Rod Forrest, a hunting lodge owner. It was later relocated to its present site in the province's Interlake region.

This year, more than 140 participants gathered just north of Woodlands, Man., to shoot clay targets ranging in size from 60 to 120 millimetres. Last year's event, with 184 participants, was the largest such shotgun event held in Canada, says Terry McKay, chair of the Woodlands Sporting Clay Shoot committee.

The shoot is billed as a non-competitive, recreational event for all ages, McKay says. "We are seeing an increasing participation and interest in recreational shooting events," McKay says. "They allow people to enjoy the great sport of shooting, while additionally giving active hunters a chance to practice. The emphasis at the event is always on safe, fun shooting." More than a dozen supervised junior participants came out this year, with two three-generation families present as well.

Depending on their level of proficiency, shooters can choose from 14 stations that include anywhere from four to 10 target presentations to simulate shots a hunter might see in the field.

A new development, McKay notes, was a vintage gun competition, won by a shooter using a side-by-side shotgun manufactured in 1895.

The top prize for participation in the clay shoot is a memorial trophy donated by the Rod Forrest family, which the winner keeps for a year and a companion keepsake trophy. DUC prizes are issued to all participants.

The event requires an all-mobile setup with McKay's 20-person chapter working flat out for two days. "We try to enhance the event annually, so we can demonstrate a future for recreational shooting," he says.



Three participants test their skills in the Woodlands Sporting Clay Shoot's signature team event known as the "BirdBrain".

State funding means dollars and...ducks

A shared interest in wetland and upland habitat conservation and the perpetuation of North America's waterfowl is the basis for long-term partnerships between DUC and well over half of the state governments in the U.S.

DUC has received funding from U.S. state governments through its sister organization, Ducks Unlimited Inc., since the mid-1960s. State funding is a major source of revenue for DUC's habitat programs. In 2003, 32 states contributed funds to sustain and enhance waterfowl production across Canada. This funding comes from state agency general revenues as well as duck stamp money and is earmarked for habitat conservation in Canada. State governments typically direct these dollars to conservation projects on the Canadian waterfowl breeding grounds.

"Funding from a number of these individual states is critical to DUC's conservation programs in the Prairie Region," says Michael Hill, a DUC conservation programs biologist located in Saskatoon. "Since our program is directed at large landscapes through habitat improvements on private lands, this money has had a major impact on the Prairies."

In order to promote a landscape-level effect with state contributions, state agency funding is typically leveraged through DUC, Ducks Unlimited Inc., and the North American Wetlands Conservation Act. Other partners may also contribute, which can help in leveraging a larger sum of money before it hits the ground in Canada. "For example," says Hill, "in Louisiana, the state money has historically been matched seven times before it even crosses the border. Factor in the rate of exchange and the dollars become more impressive."

Ducks Unlimited Inc. currently acts as the main interface with individual states, assessing interest and level of financial support. DUC develops the proposals for each state and receives the funding as part of Ducks Unlimited Inc.'s annual funding allocation to Canada. This process and these funds are a critical part of DUC's annual budget.

DUC often hosts project dedications for its state funders to recognize their important contributions to waterfowl conservation. See the following story for a recent example.

Proud landowner celebrates with Mississippi delegates

The Soloninko conservation project east of Yorkton, Sask., was dedicated this fall at a ceremony to mark the conservation efforts of DUC and the State of Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks in the Pheasant Hills Landscape. The Pheasant Hills Landscape is an important waterfowl production area targeted by DUC and funded by the State of Mississippi.

A group of representatives from the State of Mississippi and Ducks Unlimited Inc., DUC's sister organization in the United States, travelled to Saskatchewan to take part in the project dedication and a traditional fall waterfowl hunt. They were joined at the dedication site by government representatives, local landowners, and DUC staff and volunteers, including DUC president Jack Messer.

Messer acknowledged the value of the partnership with the State of Mississippi as well as the threats the Pheasant Hills Landscape and other wildlife habitats continue to face. "DUC works hard to

conserve wetlands and associated habitats, but no organization can reverse the tide by itself," said Messer. "We must work together with partners like the State of Mississippi. The Soloninko project and the ongoing work in the Pheasant Hills Landscape is a testament to the strength of those partnerships."

Joe Soloninko, the landowner who proudly allowed his land to be used for the project, was on hand at the ceremony to celebrate with the southern donors including Richard Wells, waterfowl program co-ordinator for the State of Mississippi. "We're happy to recognize people like the Soloninkos who live on this landscape and to acknowledge their important support," said Wells.

The Soloninko project dedication is representative of DUC's and the State of Mississippi's conservation work in the much larger Pheasant Hills Landscape, which is located in Saskatchewan's eastern parklands region. This landscape is an important habitat for waterfowl populations due to its permanent wetlands and good nesting cover.

The loss of these habitats, although local in nature, is international in impact, as the area is important for waterfowl from across North America. As a result, the State of Mississippi contributed \$50,000 US (\$70,000 Cdn) in 2003/2004 to help with DUC's conservation efforts, which focus on securing habitat and modifying agricultural practices to benefit both producers and wildlife.

(l-r): Lynn Posey, Mississippi State Senator and Chair of Fish and Game Commission; Knoble Lee, Mississippi Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks commissioner; Joe Soloninko, landowner and local farmer; and Billy Deviney, Mississippi Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks commissioner.



Highway interchange spares wetland

PRAIRIE REGION

Save the wetland. Move the wetland. Ignore the wetland. Those are three of the options a group of conservation-minded agencies faced when Alberta Transportation solicited their input into a roadway construction project. That 15-acre wetland's importance was difficult to describe in dollars and cents. Still, the group agreed on the site's ecological value and that's how its location was eventually worked into the design of a highway interchange being built on Highway 2 south of Innisfail.

Led by ISL/Al-Terra Engineering Ltd., the companies hired to design and build the interchange, the decision to seek outside input into road construction is part of a process called value engineering. With value engineering, Alberta Transportation gets direct, project-specific input from environmental experts, in this case, Alberta Sustainable Resource Development (ASRD), Alberta Environment, DUC and Red Deer River Naturalists. The process drew attention to the wetland's ecological and esthetic value. From there, engineers reconfigured the interchange and shifted its orientation.

The original design dated back to the 1970s. Applying contemporary environmental

standards meant a redesign, but that yielded big benefits to area wildlife, without compromising construction quality, expense or efficiency. (Moving the wetland would have cost about \$1 million.)

"In the end, communication and collaboration saved that wetland," says Kim Schmitt, an industry and government liaison with DUC. Participation in the value engineering process initiated by Alberta Transportation cost DUC nothing in terms of capital dollars. But it gave DUC a role in that wetland's conservation and let DUC provide input into how the project could be engineered to ensure optimum water levels at the site.

A critical shift in attitude means environmental consultation is an increasingly big part of roadway construction in Alberta, says Ron Bjorge. The regional head of wildlife management services for the southeast region of ASRD, Bjorge "salutes Alberta Transportation for caring and for seeking solutions."

Schmitt agrees. "This Highway 2 corridor is a busy place. It's good to see people working together to be smarter about how development impacts the natural environment."

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