

flyway

Winter Wheat nearly triples across Prairies

Three short years ago, winter wheat was hardly a blip on the radar screen of prairie grain producers, with only about 250,000 acres in winter wheat production in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

This year, winter wheat acres have almost tripled to 710,000 acres and this upward trend promises to continue as markets expand and more people see the crop's many advantages.

So what is behind the winter wheat trend? It is a surprising collection of researchers, agricultural professionals, government extension workers, leading-edge producers and conservation organizations such as Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC).

DUC's interest in winter wheat started when researchers from the Institute for Wetlands and Waterfowl Research found that very few ducks nested in spring-seeded crops — about one

nest every 100 acres — and only about four per cent of those hatched.

In winter wheat, however, about one duck nest was found in every nine acres, and about 20 per cent of those hatched, likely because there was no spring seeding to disturb the nesting grounds and the early plant growth provides protection from predators.

In addition to the crop's value as a habitat, its other supporters were touting its agronomic advantages, such as its ability to compete with weeds, avoid pests, capture early spring moisture and spread the producer's workload over a longer time period.

Still, many producers were skeptical about the crop's ability to survive Prairie winters, and were reluctant to change their traditional farming practice, says DUC Prairie Region agrologist Paul Thoroughgood.

Spring crops had to be seeded early enough to provide stubble for winter wheat seeding between Aug. 20 and Sept. 15. In addition, winter wheat was not bringing in competitive returns compared to spring wheat.

"We knew we had to overcome some doubts about winter wheat and prove to producers that not only could they grow it, but that it would be profitable," says Thoroughgood.

The first step was supporting the development of better quality winter wheat varieties that showed higher yield and improved cold hardiness. DUC helped variety development efforts by winter wheat breeders at the University of Saskatchewan and the Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada Lethbridge Research Station. In 10 years, 10 new varieties have been developed and approved with more on the way.

(Continued on back page.)



Adopt-A-Class Growing in Swan River

More than 400 students in the Swan River, Man. area are getting their hands wet this spring while they learn about wetlands through DUC's Adopt-A-Class Greenwing program. The Grade 4 students in 21 schools have been "adopted" through the generous financial support of Louisiana Pacific Canada, Spruce Products and a coalition of other forest product companies in the Swan River and surrounding region.

The funding provides teachers from small communities like Benito, Bowsman, Birch River, Mafeking and Pelican Rapids with valuable curriculum-linked lesson plans focusing on wetlands and forests. The health of these important ecosystems is vital to the economic stability of Canada and in particular the Swan River area. With additional funding from the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation, through its unique **Green Street** program, many of the classes also enjoy hands-on learning through field trips to local wetlands in the boreal forest.

One of the prime movers behind the adopted classes is Barry Waito, forest resources manager of Louisiana Pacific

Canada Limited (LP) and board chairman of the Canadian Forestry Association. Based in Swan River, (Waito has been a long time partner with DUC and has a long history of concern for the environment.)

"Louisiana Pacific believes we need a proactive approach to ensuring there is a reasonable, balanced education in the classroom," Waito says. "The DUC kit looks not only at wetlands, it also includes the Canadian Forestry kit."

In addition to being instrumental in obtaining LP's sponsorship for the Adopt-A-Class program; Waito has also brought together others in the local forest industry to adopt classes. The result has been the active involvement of other companies, including Spruce Products Ltd. (SPL), local individuals and independent logging companies. Ward Perchuk of SPL is also a committed DUC supporter and is the current volunteer chair of the Swan River Committee. Waito already has set a goal to increase LP's involvement and to bring on additional supporters from the industry for next year.

"It's a good program and teachers enjoy it," Waito comments. "I'd like to see it expanded throughout the (logging) licence area."

The field trip component of the program in the Swan River area has been enhanced through the development of an interpretive trail in the Duck Mountains. DUC was involved with other partners in developing the trail, which leads to a forest interpretive centre.

Rick Wishart, DUC's director of education, is delighted with the support for Adopt-A-Class in the Swan River area and across Canada.

"There are about 5,200 students enrolled in Adopt-A-Class across the three Prairie provinces this year," Wishart says, "and to date 1,000 sponsors have allowed us to bring this hands-on environmental education program to more than 80,000 students and their teachers across Canada"

For more information about the DUC Adopt-A-Class program visit:
www.ducks.ca/greenwing/adopt.html

DUC at the Calgary Stampede

If you happen to be at the "the Greatest Outdoor Show on Earth" in Calgary, Alta. this summer, make sure you drop in at the DUC



booth located in the heart of the Stampede Country exhibitors area. This is the sixth year DUC has had a booth at the Calgary Stampede, which runs from July 9-18.

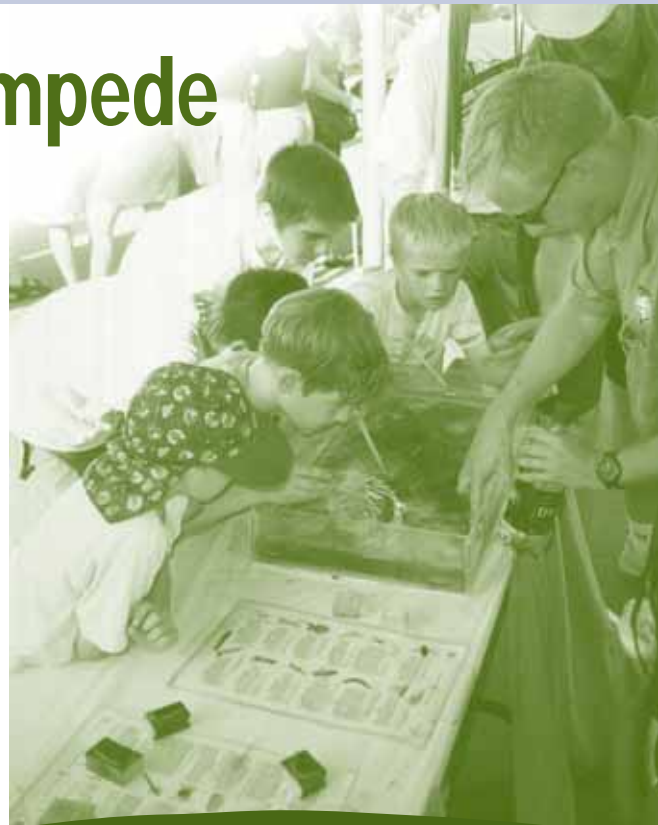
As always the DUC exhibit will focus on the "wonders of wetlands", says Jerry Brunen, DUC's marketing and communications co-ordinator for southern Alberta. This year, visitors will interact with a variety of dynamic displays to get a close-up look at underwater wetland life and witness the impacts of human activities on watersheds.

"We try to make changes to the exhibit each year," says Brunen. "This year we want to show people a map of the wetlands in

and around Calgary to put them into the 'bigger picture'. For example, Calgary is part of a major pintail breeding area and we

want to show people what we at DUC are trying to do to help this declining waterfowl species."

Interactive and informative activities at the DUC Stampede exhibit will set the stage for educating the young and young at heart. A stream table will demonstrate the power of water and the always popular "critter dipping" station will allow visitors to net aquatic invertebrates and view them under magnifiers. Stop by and prepare to get up close and personal with wetlands!



Redwing Project protects a habitat haven

Don't let the name fool you. One of Alberta's newest habitat conservation projects may be named after a single species of songbird, but the Redwing Project located just north of Beaverlodge, Alta., protects a 110-acre haven of high-quality habitat frequented by waterfowl, songbirds and raptors, as well as deer, moose and elk.



Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) and the Alberta Fish and Game Association (AFGA) partnered on the land purchase in September 2003. The deal ended years of speculation about what might happen to the land if it was not protected, says Rich Engler, a habitat technician with DUC.

"Purchases like this are more and more important all the time because there are so many demands on the landscape and there are fewer and fewer opportunities to conserve whole parcels of habitat," adds Brad Fenson, habitat development co-ordinator, AFGA.

The project's sheer diversity greatly enhances its value to area wildlife. Characterized by a combination of native parkland and spruce and aspen cover, the Redwing Project sits next to an 80-acre

natural wetland owned by the Crown. DUC is working to secure that area, too.

The Redwing Project is a good fit with AFGA's mission to protect and enhance the habitat on which fish and wildlife depend, notes Fenson. The trees on this particular project add year-round habitat value by providing critical thermal cover for white-tailed and mule deer, elk and moose in the winter.

As with many of the other properties secured by DUC in collaboration with other conservation partners, the Redwing Project land is open to the public, including hunters. To protect the property's value to wildlife, access is restricted to foot traffic.

"It is important that Ducks Unlimited Canada partners with other organizations," adds Engler. "Both organizations play an important role in habitat conservation and we were very pleased to work with Alberta Fish and Game on Redwing."

Essay on dugout management wins Manitoba student trip to North American conference

An essay on prairie dugout management earned a Manitoba youth a trip to attend a Society for Range Management conference and compete in a speaking competition with fellow high school students from all over North America. Seventeen-year-old Ashly Larson of Erickson, Man. was selected to participate in the annual meeting in Salt Lake City, Utah, in January, 2004.

Larson, who attends Erickson Collegiate Institute, is the first student from Manitoba to win the contest, which is sponsored by the Saskatchewan Society for Range Management. The contest announcement in a local agriculture publication prompted the motivated teen to write an essay titled "Dugout Management: Key to Conservation." Her winning entry

was about prairie dugout management, outlining the hazards of poor management and the benefits of proper practices. She was inspired to write about dugouts after she observed the effects of drought conditions on her family's beef farm.

This is the seventh year the contest has run in Saskatchewan and the first year it has been opened up to youth from Manitoba. Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) underwrote the expenses of Larson's Utah trip. Larson will be among 28 high school students attending the event that typically attracts over 1,000 delegates.

"It's a great experience for the kids," says Ross Macdonald, youth activity co-ordinator with the Prairie Parkland Chapter of the Society for Range Management. "They meet

people from across North America and from overseas who share their experiences and knowledge to improve range management. It is a great opportunity to see what is happening outside of an individual's range of experience.

"Ashly's submission was extremely fitting as water quality issues continue to hold the spotlight on Canada's rangelands."

Larson decided to get involved in the contest because she believes that proper range management is vital for many reasons. "Range management is important for future generations, and for both agriculture and the environment," she says. "We need to conserve and manage our resources properly. Without conservation, where is our future in agriculture?"

Wetlands a hot topic in Calgary

From an unprecedented media campaign encouraging residents to rally against a development impacting two prime wetlands, to the recent unveiling of a civic wetlands conservation policy, wetlands are a hot topic for many Calgarians.

Add to these high-profile activities Ducks Unlimited Canada's popular wetland exhibit at the Calgary Stampede and its involvement in the ChevronTexaco Learning Pathway (see story below), a city-wide distribution of a Calgary wetlands brochure and a new Calgary Airport display, and it is clear that Calgary is leading the way when it comes to wetlands. Wetlands are certainly top of mind in Cowtown, but this comes as no surprise to DUC.

"The city of Calgary is located within a wetland-rich landscape. We know that the city will ultimately grow into these areas, so we need to deal with them in a responsible way," says Jerry Brunen, DUC's marketing and communications co-ordinator for southern Alberta.

DUC and its partners continue to bring people together to educate and inform

and in some cases, to find solutions that conserve wetlands while recognizing the need for continued development. Here are a few more Calgary-area examples:

The **Bow Habitat Station** is an Alberta Centennial project and centre for aquatic environmental education, located in the heart of Calgary's Inglewood community. Interpretive components, including a viewing blind and water quality and aquatic invertebrate stations, will be built on DUC's recreated marsh situated in Pearce Estate Park, part of the Bow Habitat complex. This follows a highly successful wetland education partnership with the City of Calgary and the High River and District Chamber of Commerce, which allows schoolchildren to visit DUC's **Frank Lake interpretive station**, near High River.

The **City of Calgary Wetland Inventory** is in its second phase, with DUC taking a lead role in this high-profile and influential geographic information systems (GIS) mapping project. It is a key component of the **Calgary Wetland Conservation Plan**.

Nationally and regionally, this plan is viewed as "a precedent-setting wetland policy," says Brunen. The Province of Alberta is embarking on a wetland policy for the entire province, which may be in place by the end of 2004. DUC is playing a significant role in the development of both of these wetland initiatives.

Weed Lake lies just east of Calgary, near Langdon. Drained in 1971, this 1,500-acre wetland is being restored as a regionally significant wildlife area, and will receive thoroughly treated storm and effluent water. The restored wetland will provide recreational opportunities for the entire Calgary region. DUC's partners in this project include the Municipal District of Rocky View, Western Irrigation District and Alberta Environment.

"All of these projects demonstrate how wetlands can be included as educational, functional and esthetic elements in highly populated areas while providing critical habitat for hundreds of species of Alberta wildlife," Brunen says.

Pathway to learning

An interpretive trail located in Calgary's most popular urban park will get a lot of attention this year thanks to its high-profile location and a featured spot at the Mayor's Environmental Expo planned for early June.

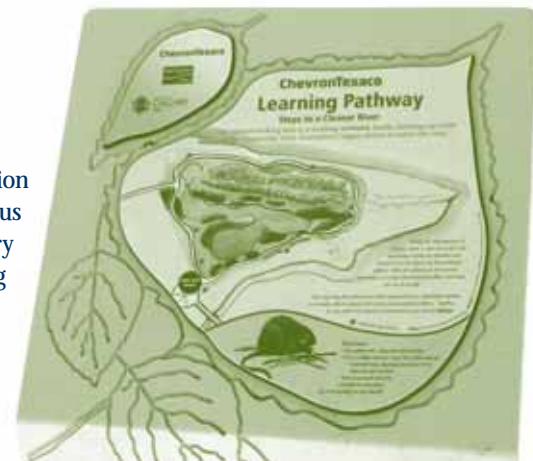
Prince's Island Park, located near the Eau Claire district of southeastern downtown, took a turn for the educational when the ChevronTexaco Learning Pathway opened last spring. The pathway features nine interpretive signs sponsored by well-known environmental organizations, including two paid for by Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC), says Lorelei Piotto, external affairs advisor with Chevron Canada Resources.

DUC's signs, located near a constructed wetland along the pathway, describe

"how wetlands function and their value for us as a society," says Jerry Brunen, marketing and communications co-ordinator with DUC in southern Alberta. DUC also offered technical expertise on the constructed wetland. It is a natural filter for storm water that used to drain directly into the lagoon between Prince's Island and Eau Claire.

The pathway recently won a 2004 Downtown Vitality Award from the City of Calgary and a Salute to Excellence Award from the Chamber of Commerce. Pathway tours will be held during the Mayor's Environmental Expo on June 5, 2004. The City is also developing a curriculum-based program teachers can use to enhance environmental learning modules.

Other pathway panel subjects include native plant restoration, the Bow River and urban water management.



Signs along the trail educate visitors on the value of wetlands.



A school group tours the ChevronTexaco Learning Pathway.

One print – and a hat to go

The extra company was exciting. But when up to 40 people a week began to visit Ducks Unlimited Canada's (DUC) Edmonton office to pick up the prints they'd successfully bid on through the Sealed Bid Auction (SBA) program, staff knew it was time to try something different, especially if the company wanted to build a lasting relationship with the region's newest owners of DUC art.

The solution came via a new street-level storefront location DUC opened last fall, says Craig Berke, fundraising manager, Aspen Parkland North. Located at 10719, 181 Street, the store eases print pickup for buyers and gives DUC staff a better chance to tell visitors what the company does.

By tracking SBA participants, Berke knew that "97 per cent of these people hadn't been in contact with Ducks Unlimited Canada before." Sharing information about the conservation company helped recruit

at least 15 new volunteers and attracted dozens of new faces to DUC events.

As of February, the storefront also stocks additional DUC merchandise like pins, caps and clothing. The new storefront location makes it easier for new and long-time DUC supporters to purchase some of the company's most popular items. DUC events, however, are the only venue for exclusive merchandise.

The Aspen Parkland office launched the SBA in April 2002. DUC's limited edition prints are now displayed at 158 SBA easels throughout Central Alberta, including 118 in the urban Edmonton region.

Calgary currently has 40 easel locations in the city, says Lloyd Derry, fundraising manager, Prairie district. At least one chapter, the Chinook Drakes,

now raises more through the SBA than at its annual dinner. Derry anticipates the SBA's continued success, with a goal to establish between 100 and 125 easel locations within the greater Calgary area, will eventually lead Calgary to open a storefront location similar to Edmonton's.



DUC helps provide crop credits for designation

Assiniboine Community College (ACC) and Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) joined forces last fall to provide continuing education credits for local Certified Crop Advisers (CCAs). With support from DUC, a three-hour course was developed and offered by ACC for credits, which CCAs must earn to keep their designation.

The Certified Crop Adviser program is largely spearheaded by agriculture industry partners, and administered by the American Society of Agronomy through local boards. The 10-year-old program is an effort to assure producers that members have met a set standard of knowledge and experience.

Mitch Long, faculty member at Assiniboine Community College, instructed the 2003 CCA course at ACC. "The response from the participants was very favourable," Long says. "CCAs need to keep up with the newest information, and DUC is an excellent source when it comes to water and soil management.

"The course was about the benefits of wetlands, zero-till, precision fertilizer applications, and riparian zone impacts on crops and the surrounding land," Long continues. "Some of the information came from government sources, and some from our two-year Technical Agrologist Diploma; DUC provided a significant part of the information."

Manitoba Agriculture's John Heard is chair of the CCA program on the Prairies. "We have invited their people to act as technical presenters in the past. DUC has compiled a great deal of research,

and they are a leader in providing science-based information, particularly in the conservation cropping field. It was good to work with them," he says.

"We are always encouraging institutions and groups to provide content for continuing education credits," Heard adds. "The CCA program is a way to keep people abreast of changes and new research, so producers receiving advice from a CCA can know they are getting a certain standard of quality. Our goal is to help improve the links between farmers, industry professionals and scientific research to help strengthen the industry."

There are approximately 15,000 registered CCAs in North America, including about 800 on the Prairies. Many of them are employed by the larger grain handling and service companies such as Agricore United, Cargill and James Richardson International, with the remainder employed with independent retailers, as independent consultants, with government with industry.

Barry Ross, an agronomist with DUC, helped to initiate DUC's involvement with the course. "The ACC has a strong agricultural program; it was a natural fit. We are always trying to get the word out about water," Ross says. "If there is enough interest, we will be looking at other possible course locations in western Canada. DUC has some major ecological goals, but only through working together with farmers and private landowners can we help change anything for the better. Farmers can make a bigger profit by treating the land well, so in the end everyone benefits."

Winter Wheat nearly triples across Prairies (cont. from front page)

Meanwhile, with partner organizations such as the Alberta Winter Wheat Producers Commission and Winter Cereals Canada, DUC has been able to influence winter wheat market development. The greatest step in improved market returns came with the announcement of a "Select" program aimed at getting a higher return per bushel for winter wheat.

Under the Canadian Wheat Board's Canada Western Red Winter (CWRW) Select market development contract program, producers now receive a premium for their crops, provided they use one of seven eligible varieties identified under the program. The CWRW Select program segregates varieties better suited to milling and baking to improve market acceptance with the goal of improving returns for farmers.

"We want people to succeed in winter wheat production and we want to help them do that by assisting their decisions about what varieties will work best on their farm," says Canadian Wheat Board agronomist Mike Grenier.

Grenier says the Canadian Wheat Board program started with 10 producers bringing in about 3,000 tonnes of Select winter wheat in 2002. In 2004, more than 170 producers have enrolled in the program and are expected to produce over 40,000 tonnes of Select winter wheat.

"We've always been convinced this program would grow," he adds. "The returns have to be there and the variety performance has to be there and as that happens, more and more producers are adopting it."

As a result of matching the right variety with the right land and management practices, producers started to see the benefits of adding winter wheat to their crop rotation.

Bryan Nobel farms in Barons, Alta. He likes winter wheat because it has higher

yields than spring wheat and allows him to extend the use of his farming equipment over a longer, less intense period.

He also likes the fact that winter wheat is less vulnerable to pests and diseases, and reduces the stress and uncertainty of farming because he knows there is at least one crop already in the ground at spring time.

"Winter wheat fits our prairie ecology," Nobel says. "Its water use patterns match our climate. It takes advantage of early spring moisture."

Having producers like Nobel endorsing winter wheat has been one of the most important factors in increasing the crop's use in the Prairies. "Many producers adopt new practices based on successes demonstrated by their peers," says Thoroughgood.

As winter wheat continues to gain momentum, agribusinesses also recognized its value to them and to their customers.

In November 2003, Agricore United donated \$60,000 to support DUC's winter wheat program over the next three years. As well, James Richardson International has incorporated winter wheat into its crop rotation at its Kelburn Farm, where hundreds of agronomists and producers go for training.

While the habitat benefits of winter wheat have not influenced producers' desire to grow it as much as the market and diversification benefits, Thoroughgood says many like the fact winter wheat provides good duck nesting grounds.

"Farmers are close to the land. They care about the environment and so when they realize that winter wheat is not only adding to their bottom line, it is also helping wildlife, it just gives them one more reason to try it."

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The *Flyway* newsletter is published by Ducks Unlimited Canada
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publication agreement #40064849